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Fleeting Fictions:
Film Technology, Adaptation, and a History of the Hollywood Novel, 1920-1950

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

by

Justin Richard Gautreau

June 2015

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Katherine Kinney, Chairperson

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The Dissertation of Justin Richard Gautreau is approved:

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University of California, Riverside

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Dedicated to my parents

And to my sisters

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Fleeting Fictions:
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by

Justin Richard Gautreau

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in English
University of California, Riverside, June 2015
Dr. Katherine Kinney, Chairperson

Fleeting Fictions argues that novels central to the genre of Hollywood fiction engaged with film's technological ramifications as a method of countering the studio system's promotional image of itself. My use of the word "technology" refers not only to the technical infrastructure of film production but also to the more figurative technologies surrounding Hollywood, specifically the Hays Office responding to celebrity scandal off screen while attempting to regulate content on screen.

The first half of this dissertation examines fiction of the 1920s and early 1930s that responded to film's technological restrictions. Chapter 1, for instance, argues that the extra-girl novels of the 1920s viewed cinema's lack of sound as linked to the broader forms of silence restricting women in the industry, while Chapter 2 argues that the hard-boiled detective novels of the late 1920s and early 1930s likened Hollywood Boulevard to an expansive soundstage where stars performed their studio-mandated "morals clause." In their attempts to tap into the commercial potential of these behind-the-scenes

narratives, the studios adapted several of the novels into sugarcoated films once they had the technological tools to do so, which in part doomed some novels to obscurity.

The second half of this dissertation examines texts that respond to the industry's technological abundance with the rise of three-strip technicolor in the mid-1930s. Bringing the forgotten texts of the first half of the dissertation to bear on more canonical texts, Chapter 3 argues that fiction from 1939 pushed for an understanding of technicolor film as aesthetically rooted in Southern California boosterism and its political agenda to normalize whiteness. Such a literary critique prefigured film noir of the 1940s and 1950s. Chapter 4 argues that Los Angeles noir inherited the tradition of the Hollywood novel by engaging with the technological excess of the studio system. In so doing, however, film noir came to eclipse the function of the Hollywood novel.

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Introduction

Nearly as soon as it established roots in Southern California in the 1910s, the film industry inspired a body of fiction that added to its sense of optimism and romance in public imagination. Short stories about moving picture technologies had appeared in magazines as early as 1895, but Hollywood's star system provided authors with a readymade narrative arch. In the book *My Strange Life: The Intimate Life Story of a Moving Picture Actress* from 1915, an anonymous young woman recounts her journey to film stardom, an accomplishment she attributes to her individual determination: "I sometimes wonder who writes the stories about actresses who suddenly spring into fame ... While I have no doubt that this does occur, why does not someone write the story of a young woman who slowly works her way to the top and holds her position because she has thoroughly learned her business from the ground up?" (67-8). By including photographs of Mary Pickford, Pearl White, and other famous Hollywood actresses, *My Strange Life* insinuated that any one of these women might have written it, thereby democratizing the narrative of stardom for a female readership.¹

But the contagious optimism of the 1910s would not last. As studios closed their gates in the early 1920s and star scandals inundated newspaper headlines, former celebratory depictions of the industry suddenly appeared outdated and naïve. To cure its hangover of the 1910s, the industry invited Washington, D.C.'s former Postmaster General, Will Hays, to help build its wholesome image—a process that included

¹ In their 2008 bibliography of fiction from the silent era, Ken Wlaschin and Stephen Bottomore have insisted that the work "is undoubtedly fiction, probably written by [Edward J.] Clode," the book's purported editor (233).

regulating the kinds of stories newspapers and magazines could publish. Because of its generic sense of make-believe, fiction remained an avenue of print beyond the industry's direct control and could therefore broach subject matter that was otherwise concealed. For those working in the industry, then, to write fiction about Hollywood after Hays's arrival entailed a kind of political choice—either to reinforce the promotional façade of the industry as before, or to penetrate it.

Taking over vaudeville houses and nickelodeons in cities across the United States, film at the turn of the twentieth century spread as an economically efficient practice aimed at a working class audience. Unlike a stage play that relied on actors and sets, a silent movie could be reproduced and replayed endlessly, even crossing language barriers for non-English speaking viewers. As historian Lary May notes, because of their tendency to mock figures of dominant authority and Victorian values, movies also ignited a widespread panic among state officials and women's groups. Such moral crusaders feared that unregulated films would cause more harm than good in the social world. Initially born on the East Coast, the film industry soon gave way to the first film censorship organization in New York called the National Board of Review, which exercised the power to shut down movie theaters screening morally questionable films. As a result, many filmmakers by 1910 came to recognize the financial risk in producing narratives that endorsed subversive content.

Other filmmakers would not give in so easily. After a film company took Ohio's censor board to the Supreme Court on the grounds of First Amendment violation in 1915, the Court determined that the film industry did not qualify as an art form and therefore

had no constitutional rights. In the eyes of the U.S. government, the film industry remained “a business, plain and simple, originated and conducted for profit” (qtd. in Doherty 33). Following this decision, film production was subjected to the same type of inspection as any other commercial product, a process that could vary depending on agendas of individual states. Meanwhile, as Thomas Doherty explains, the U.S. government reserved their constitutional power to intercede in the film industry by forming a federal censorship agency if necessary.

This push for moral regulation also played out in the community of Hollywood once the film industry moved to Southern California in the 1910s. Away from the immoral and polluted cities of the East Coast, Hollywood and Southern California more broadly promoted physical and moral health amid open spaces and clean air. “The City of Hollywood,” one brochure read, “is noted for its many beautiful homes, fine paved streets and pleasant drives” (Torrence 53). The community’s self-image made up of what film historian Leo Braudy calls its “Christian temperance utopia” (21) helps to explain why the people of Hollywood were less than thrilled by the arrival of the movies. The Chamber of Commerce, for instance, demanded that Charlie Chaplin’s studio off Sunset Boulevard on La Brea Avenue keep up a respectable façade, one that would blend in with surrounding architecture instead of drawing attention to itself as a film studio. Of course, such a civic restriction would dramatically reverse the following decade as public structures increasingly resembled movie sets. Still, with an unprecedented amount of people arriving in Southern California, most of whom were young women, the city could not sustain its stance on film as a passing fad.

In September 1921, everything moral groups had feared movies would do, from corrupting young women to encouraging pre-marital sexual relations, had suddenly come true when famous film comedian Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was accused of the rape and murder of extra girl Virginia Rappe in a San Francisco hotel room. No longer a place of opportunity and optimism, Hollywood—synonymous with the movies themselves—immediately turned into a place saturated in sin and corruption in the public’s imagination. Subsequent industry scandals, including the still-unsolved death of director William Desmond Taylor the following year, only confirmed this negative image. As mogul Louis B. Mayer anxiously told a friend, “If this keeps up there’s wont be any motion picture industry” (qtd. in Hallett 195).

The Arbuckle scandal prompted the major studios to invite Will Hays as a means of keeping the lingering threat of federal censorship at bay. Upon accepting the position, Hays worked closely with the studio heads to form the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA—commonly referred to as the Hays Office). One of Hays’s first order of business as president of the MPPDA was to ban Arbuckle’s films from all theaters in April 1922. A few months later, Hays traveled from his New York office to Hollywood to see firsthand the industry he now represented. A banner reading “Welcome Will Hays to the motion picture capitol of the world!” hung across Hollywood Boulevard, while Sid Grauman displayed an enlarged photograph of Hays’s face atop the awning of his Million Dollar Theater in downtown Los Angeles. Hays concluded his week’s visit by delivering a speech at the Hollywood Bowl. To a crowd of thousands

made up of the film community and the curious public, he spoke passionately of the motion picture's moral potential and the industry's bright future.

A movement some Hollywood employees detested and others praised, the MPPDA aimed to “[e]stablish[] and maintain[] the highest possible moral and artistic standards in motion picture production” (Indiana). James R. Quirk, editor of the most popular and long-running fan magazine *Photoplay*, openly supported Hays's presence in the industry and looked forward to “a new ideal in motion pictures” under his leadership (Slide, *Inside Fan* 54). Screenwriter and novelist Frances Marion, on the other hand, recalls in her autobiography that “scenarists resented having their wings clipped [by the Hays Office]; they dared not write frankly about any vital issue, but were forced to turn out sugarcoated yarns” (*Off With!* 94).

While the MPPDA dealt largely with screenplays, Hays's public relations committee sought to make Hollywood as a place appear more wholesome in the wake of scandal. In response to the women “who arrived in Hollywood on every train and bus, eager for a glamorous career” (Hays 380), for instance, Hays worked with the YWCA to form the Hollywood Studio Club. According to Hays, the Studio Club would help “young women in motion picture work” by providing them a residence “in the very heart of Hollywood, on a quiet street in a respectable neighborhood” (Hays 380). Scholar Heidi Kenaga has more recently argued, however, that the inception of the Studio Club reflected Hays's investment not in the well-being of young women but in his own “broader public-relations agenda to revise moviegoers' perception of the cinematic product” (130). Emphasizing his underlying commercial interests, Hays wrote to the

YWCA New York headquarters in 1923 calling for “a systematic effort” to “insert[] in magazines and periodicals” the “actual [discouraging] conditions of Hollywood ... created by the descent upon that city of so many young girls without prospects or means of support, desirous of winning fame in the movies and finally having to fall back on the community, the industry, and Y.W.C.A.” (Indiana).

To prevent unflattering publicity for more popular actors and directors, Hays also pushed studios to implement so-called morality clauses—that is, contractual obligations for actors to behave “morally” in public. As he writes in his memoirs, “I realized that there was only one place where any evil in motion picture production might be eliminated and its great good advantages retained, and that was on the set, at the time and place the pictures were actually shot” (340). Zukor once described this procedure as “[a]n unwritten code of behavior for industry personnel” (205), but a 1921 *New York Times* piece indicates that the clause was far from unwritten. Pulling a direct quote from the contractual insertion of those working for Universal, the article reads:

The actor (actress) agrees to conduct himself (herself) with due regard to public conventions and morals and agrees that he (she) will not do or commit anything tending to degrade him (her) in society or bring him (her) into public hatred, contempt, scorn or ridicule, or tending to shock, insult or offend the community or outrage public morals or decency, or tending to the prejudice of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company or the motion picture industry” (“Morality Clause”).

In 1923, moreover, Hays received a letter detailing “the new moral character and public sentiment clause which has been introduced in director and star film contracts since the Arbuckle scandal” (Indiana).

As Richard deCordova has argued, one of the ways the industry relied on the star system was to equate the “real” life personality depicted in newspapers and fan magazines with the roles he or she played on screen: “[E]verything written about the players’ real personalities would support, amplify, and, in effect, advertise the representations for sale in the movies themselves” (deCordova 88). Actors who broke from their loveable onscreen persona, as Arbuckle did, could potentially jeopardize the industry’s revenue. Hays understood well that, like a star’s offscreen personality, the physical place of Hollywood served as the ultimate advertisement of the industry. To cover all their bases, then, studios also prohibited fan magazines from covering scandals in depth; and since fan magazines relied on the studios for their material, journalists had little choice but to comply. In this respect, the Hays Office—both the MPPDA and public relations branches—assumed the position of the industry’s gatekeeper, mediating the representation of Hollywood in print, on screen, and even on its streets.

If Hays attempted to control what went out of the studio gates, he had similar influence over who could enter them. As early as 1921, Hays wrote to Zukor, “My brother Hink has told me fully of his visit with you and I appreciate it” (Adolph Zukor Corr.). Almost as soon as he became the president of the MPPDA, close friends and strangers alike began taking advantage of his status in the industry. In September 1922, a professional acquaintance asked for Hays’s assistance in securing a job for a friend: “I am

sure it will be mutually satisfactory if Mr. Grauman could meet Mrs. Kelly. She is an organist of very high quality and I know no reason why you should not present her to Mr. Grauman” (Indiana). Two months later, Hays received another letter, this time from a son of a friend, stating “I would greatly appreciate it if you would make possible an interview for me with some of the companies in Hollywood” (Indiana).

While some letters to Hays focused their inquiries on employment, others more often requested privileged access to visit the movie studios. Studios had started closing their gates to tourists to stay on production schedule, but Hays regularly disregarded this industry policy to accommodate his friends, some of whom had potential political sway. In September 1922, Hays wrote to mogul Jesse Lasky of Famous Players, “This will introduce my very good friend, Mr. M.C. Brush, Senior Vice President, of the American International Corporation, and one of the real men of this country. He wants to see something of the industry and I know it will be a pleasure for you to meet him. Any favor shown him will be appreciated by me” (Indiana). Hays contacted Lasky again the following month with a telegram reading, “I hate to bother you again with this kind of thing but ... [i]f Mr. Woodford shows up I would be glad if you would have some of the boys show him about. He is a great friend of the Attorney General and mutual friends have asked that he be allowed to see the studios. I think the attention will be a real good investment” (Indiana).

A letter from Hays began to function as a kind of golden ticket to enter a studio. In this respect, Hays’s printed word provided authorized entry into the otherwise private space of a studio. As he wrote a friend in October, “I suggest that you hand this letter to

[your son] and when he is in California, if he will present it to the managers at the studios, I know they will be very glad to meet him” (Indiana). Not surprisingly, the more Hays accommodated the requests, the more obscure the favors became. In October, another friend wrote, “I do not know whether you know Mr. Walter R. Woodford of Cleveland, but ... [h]is son is traveling to California, and Mr. Woodford and I would appreciate it if you will issue a card of admission to the Hollywood studios. His son is visiting out there and wants to see the Movies in the Making” (Indiana).

Rather than contacting studio heads directly about visitors, Hays began to leave the somewhat uncomfortable work to Thomas Patten and Fred Beetson, his PR men who ran the office on Hollywood Boulevard, across the street from the future location of Grauman’s Chinese Theater. In 1923 Hays telegrammed Patten, “Miss Sullivan is the niece of Jabez Woolley of Evansville, Indiana, one of my very good friends. ... All you need to do is just see that Miss Sullivan gets a look at some studio” (Indiana). The situation became so extreme that in August Beetson wrote Hays a polite letter of concern:

The situation regarding closing the Studios to visitors is really serious and important ... [T]hey simply will not accept the casual tourist and the average person who comes with a letter of introduction, because it greatly interferes with their work and costs them a vast amount of money. ... The Roach, Fox, Universal and Warner Brothers Studios will not have visitors at all. The balance are closing down gradually and firmly, through this office. (Indiana)

In spite of Beetson's awkward position of having to balance the conflicting demands of the studios and Hays, Hays rather amusingly persisted in granting his favors from the East Coast. The same month, he telegraphed his office acknowledging the general studio policy before disregarding it entirely:

John Ersinger city engineer at Sullivan and old friend has a daughter Mary Belle Sheridan who is in Los Angeles ... where she will be few days [sic] ... She wants to see inside of some studios ... Do not want to break their rule but possibly you can get in touch with her and take her into some studio yourself on some trip Suggest that you do not send her but take her so that there is no violation of the new rule which the folks have made.

(Indiana)

A similar situation occurred yet again when Hays informed a friend that the studios "have been very drastic about the new rule out there prohibiting all visitors from studios. The word that comes to us from the Coast is that the producers are enforcing this very rigidly. I do, however, want to be of any possible assistance" (Indiana). This particular letter ends with Hays advising his friend to tag along with Beetson on his routine visits to the studios as a kind of loophole for guests. What this correspondence continues to demonstrate Hays's influence over not only Hollywood film but also Hollywood as a place. Just as film technology directly determined a film audience's sensorial viewing experience and the kinds of narratives studios could produce, the Hays Office became a more figurative technology by mediating what the public could see on and off screen.

In opposition to the novels that worked to counter Hollywood's promotional apparatus, other novels written by industry players following the Arbuckle scandal bolstered Hays's agenda. In 1922 filmmaker Rupert Hughes, who had "a very warm friendship" with Hays (Hays 343), published his novel *Souls for Sale* (1922), which he quickly adapted into a film of the same name. The novel openly mocks the state censor boards, some of which "cut out all reference to expected children [in film]. Would you believe it? ... And they did it all in the name of protecting morals—as if girls and boys never went wrong until the movies came along" (148). Advocating the social benefits of film, the novel ends with young actress Remember Steddon deciding to "yearn upward toward the sun and spread the incense of her soul as far as the winds of the world would carry it" (404). Although she admittedly "had sinned" in her life, "she would make atonement by entertainment" (404).

Along similar lines, George Randolph and Lilian Chester's *On and Off the Lot* (1924) concludes with a chapter titled "Just Beginning" that implicitly endorses Hays while never mentioning his name: "[F]or, lo! we are come on virtuous days when the censorship spirit has written a morality clause into every contract" (325). The happy ending continues as the novel's protagonist Izzy Iskovitch finally attains success as a successful producer in "that great moral industry" (326): "The machine began to click, and then on the screen there flashed the three words which for nearly a decade had been the beacon of Izzy's existence, his light in the darkness, and the guerdon of his days: ISIDOR ISKOVITCH PRESENTS" (328).

Indeed, the Hays Office kept a close eye on unflattering depictions of the industry, especially when they bore Hays's name. In response to a damning newspaper editorial in 1922, for instance, one of Hays's assistants wrote, "According to ... this morning's Times, Mr. Hays was employed by the motion picture industry for political objects rather than for the purposes looking toward the improvement of motion pictures. If there is any evidence to support that accusation," the note smugly continued, "all of us here, particularly myself, would be anxious to learn of it" (Indiana). On October 29th, 1929, *Motion Picture News* published an article that similarly drew their attention. According to the report, famous American novelist Theodore Dreiser planned to write an "exposé" of Hollywood "using the life of Will H. Hays as its central character. ... Dreiser, it is said, selected the figure of Hays as the character on which to hang his delving into the industry" ("Dreiser May"). Hays's papers at the Indiana State Library include a clipping of this article pasted to a piece of paper, making clear his thorough awareness of the situation. On an MPPDA daily report two weeks before the piece appeared, one employee wrote to Hays, "Would like to talk with you about Theodore Dreiser ... May be important" (Indiana). An outspoken critic of industry censorship around this time,² Dreiser interestingly—perhaps even suspiciously—denied plans for the novel in the next month's issue of *Motion Picture News*. While the magazine insisted that the original report had "c[o]me from a source regarded as reliable," it explained that "Mr. Dreiser has requested that a denial be made, stating that he has no intention of writing a book of that nature" ("Dreiser Denies"). Suspicion aside, these details suggest that

² Dreiser had written an article for *Theater Guild Magazine* in May 1929 titled, "The Meddlesome Decade: How Censorship is Making Our Civilization Ridiculous."

popular fiction exposing the industry could potentially undermine Hays's agenda precisely because it remained outside of his direct control.

If Hays authorized what could be seen on screen in the same way he could authorize who could enter the space of a movie studio (even against a studio's will), I argue that Hollywood fiction repeatedly provided a readership with unauthorized admission behind the scenes, unfiltered by film technology and the Hays Office alike. Penned by those writing for the movies and occupying the lower end of the industry's socioeconomic hierarchy, these novels attempted to elicit critical interrogation of the so-called dream factory at a time when a handful of major studios monopolized film production and distribution. I also argue that, in an effort to penetrate the industry's promotional apparatus, novelists often anchored their critique in the representational limits—and eventually abundance—of film technology while avoiding the fate of a reductive film adaptation. The novels of the 1920s, for instance, drew on cinema's literal silence to retrieve a figurative voice of feminine struggle.

As my dissertation title indicates, I insist that the process of adaptation plays a key role in the evolution of Hollywood fiction. On a direct level, the studios would often take notice of the commercial potential of these behind-the-scenes novels and work to adapt them into Hays-friendly films once they had the technological tools to do so, a process that doomed some novels to obscurity. As a result, writers were in constant battle to come up with unadaptable work. I do not mean to say that film adaptation should always be understood as a negative process, but I do consider adaptation in this context as a political tool for the relative few who had the means to do so in the first place. In this

respect, I am also interested in the ephemeral quality of the critical awareness these works entail, as they resist dominant culture for a moment before being absorbed by it.

I also consider “adaptation” in this context as a process that went far beyond a unilateral, book-to-film direction. In addition to the studios adapting the novels, for instance, novelists often took their cues from the lighthearted film adaptations endorsed by the Hays Office, thereby reversing the traditional direction of book-to-film to film-to-book. Further, in a clear shift from the time of Chaplin’s studios, the industry began adapting such public spaces as Hollywood Boulevard into a cinematic theme park to keep tourists and fans invested in the movies while keeping them away from studio gates. The novels regularly reflect how Hollywood as a place had a dialectical relationship with the aesthetic of studio productions. The rise of the talkies and construction of studio soundstages, for instance, expedited the tourist attractions on Hollywood Boulevard. Not only did the emergence of what I refer to as tourist Hollywood prompt Hollywood fiction to adapt its thematic concerns but it also set the stage for some Los Angeles noir of the 1940s and 1950s.

A handful of studies on Hollywood fiction have provided the platform from which this dissertation takes its cue. Carolyn See’s 1963 dissertation, one of the earliest studies of the Hollywood novel, similarly argues that Will Hays’s arrival in Los Angeles prompted novelists to begin scrutinizing the industry. Prior to the censorship codes, she explains, “fictional interest in the movies ... was limited to techniques and thrills” (26). Another important point See makes is that while “[m]any novels condemn[ed] Hollywood,” they nevertheless sought to “evoke quick, easy reactions in the reader by

dealing in the emotions, in sensationalism” in ways similar to that of mainstream cinema (36). I find these two central points to be somewhat at odds. On the one hand, See asserts that the Hollywood novel reacts to Hays’s political sanitation of the industry, but on the other, she claims the genre relies on cheap thrills to sell itself. By understanding the novels as responding not only to the political climate of the industry but also to the medium’s technological conventions and conditions, I would argue that what See reduces to Hollywood sensationalism in the novels instead becomes the aesthetic means by which the novels construct a more critical lens to view the industry. In fact, although the novels often depict Hollywood in ostensibly outrageous ways, my archival research has confirmed the validity, and therefore the historical value, of such depictions.

Since See’s dissertation, several scholars such as David Fine have studied novels taking place in Southern California in general, but extensive historical studies of novels set in Hollywood remained relatively sparse until the 1980s—a decade that witnessed the release of the Production Code files and a plethora of studies on the history of the studio system. Nancy Brooker-Bowers (1985) and Anthony Slide’s (1995) respective bibliographies of the Hollywood novel paved the way for Bruce Chipman’s *Into America’s Dream-Dump: A Postmodern Study of the Hollywood novel* (1999). Chipman attempts to trace the trajectory of the genre by dividing the Hollywood novel into three general categories: the early Hollywood novel of the 1920s, which handled the film industry “with no more than a light contempt”; the mature Hollywood novel of the 1930s through the 1950s that portrayed Hollywood as “the embodiment of the nation’s evils and the outgrowth of a sick society”; and the more recent Hollywood novel of the 1960s and

1970s that simply “continue[s] with the established themes and tone of the genre” (xiv). Chipman’s study fails to account for the generic shifts in the novels over the decades, why those shifts occurred, and—most importantly—how the genre developed as a consequence of cinema’s technological evolution. Rather than measuring the novels by a vague highbrow literariness, I see the novels that engage most extensively with Hollywood’s technical infrastructure as most central to the genre.

John Parris Springer’s *Hollywood Fictions: The Dream Factory in American Popular Literature* (2000) advances the scholarship most significantly by taking a more historical approach. Springer prefaces his study by complicating the scholarly tendency to reduce Hollywood fiction to “a single literary form (the novel)” (21). For Springer, other forms of writing such as short stories, editorials, and star autobiographies need to be included in any discussion of Hollywood fiction to understand the “larger discursive context” (21). By looking to a wider range of publication formats, Springer recovers several serialized novels that complicate previous scholarship’s claims and categorizations. While I do agree that the body of Hollywood fiction should not be limited to novels, I also wonder how the novel form specifically—its verbosity, its demand for temporal commitment, its cultural capital—inflects the readerly reception of its content that contrasts the movie-going experience. The fact that *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* (both 1925) constitute their respective authors’ first attempt at a novel, for instance, indicates a conscious move away from alternative, even more familiar, narrative forms. I am certainly indebted to Springer’s study since it has introduced me to several

novels crucial to my argument, yet it lacks an adequate explanation of the generic shifts in Hollywood fiction.

As extensive historical research informs Springer's study, Chip Rhodes's *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel* (2008) takes a psychoanalytic approach to the Hollywood novel and explores the genre's persistence across the studio and the post-studio eras. He examines not only the novels but also the screenplays penned by the authors because, for Rhodes, studying their "writing both inside and outside of the film industry is important to a full understanding" of the literary genre (31). His decision to focus on a handful of works often allows for a more detailed discussion than Springer's study that favors breadth, yet his choice to focus on only canonical authors such as Nathanael West, Budd Schulberg, and Raymond Chandler limits his discussion. For instance, in his chapter on Joan Didion's *Play it as it Lays* (1970), Rhodes claims that Didion's novel "is unique . . . because it is one of the very few that focuses exclusively on the effects of the culture industry on women" (106-7). Up until her novel, according to Rhodes, "[m]ost Hollywood novels [were] concerned with the artistic integrity of male protagonists" (107). This assertion reflects his narrow scope as it fails to acknowledge novels published nearly half a century earlier that condemned the industry for its objectification of women. Rhodes's work no doubt adds to the critical conversation around Hollywood fiction, but his decision to stick to canonical texts implies that Hollywood novels currently out of print need not be studied. I do not mean to imply that canonical texts should be disregarded in the ongoing discussion of the Hollywood novel, but I do think that a much richer discussion becomes possible when one considers their

broader intertextual (and inter-media) networks, including the generic literary trends that led up to their publication.

What remains absent from these studies on the Hollywood novel is an extensive engagement with the history of Hollywood itself—its films, promotional apparatus, censorship codes, and technical infrastructure. To suggest that such fiction existed simply as a response to the public's curiosity with the industry, as these scholars tend to do, seems to me inadequate. After all, fan magazines and some feature-length films about Hollywood were produced for the same reason. What could a novel offer that other publicity outlets could not? I insist that the novelists were well aware of not only Hollywood films contemporary to their writing but also the way, to use deCordova's word, extrafilmic discourse made up of newspapers, fan magazines, and morality clauses began to blur the line between fiction and reality.

To fill this critical gap, I structure my chapters around the watershed moments in the industry's technological evolution (especially the advent of sound and technicolor). My first chapter examines Hollywood novels from the 1920s within a complex network made up of film narratives, film technology, fan magazines and newspapers, as well as the studios working to contain the movie-crazed fan they had created in the 1910s. Focusing on the novels *Minnie Flynn* by scenarist Frances Marion and *The Skyrocket* by reporter Adela Rogers St. Johns (both published in 1925), I argue that 1920s Hollywood fiction dealing with the exploited starlet engages specifically with cinema's literal silence to retrieve a figurative voice of feminine struggle muted by Hollywood's promotional apparatus. While studios produced comedy versions of the extra-girl narrative to reduce

the surplus of aspirants in Hollywood, the female novelists aimed to revise the sugarcoated material of the films in order to prevent young women from putting faith in a system that was embalming youth for profit. I conclude this chapter by exploring the extent to which talkie films such as *What Price Hollywood?* (1932) and *A Star is Born* (1937) signal the industry's absorption of the subversive literary genre.

While Chapter 1 seeks to answer how novelists responded to Hollywood's silence, Chapter 2 looks to a set of hard-boiled detective novels written amid the rise of the talkies from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Although the walls of movie studios came up during the later years of silent cinema, the advent of synchronized sound in film prompted the need for updated stages to mute outside noise. These structures of steel and concrete shut out a curious public and increased the mystery surrounding film production. The studios, thinking of ways to take full advantage of speech in the movies, also invited male novelists, journalists, and playwrights to Hollywood with the hope that they could pen natural-sounding dialogue for the screen. I argue that the detective figure, paralleling the male writers brought to Hollywood to write for the talkies, served as the updated vehicle to elicit awareness of Hollywood as a culture industry. Largely forgotten novels such as A.C. and Carmen Edington's *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1929) and Raoul Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* (1930) offer historical documentation of the film industry's promotional façade spilling over the studio gates and onto the public streets of Hollywood. Not only does the hard-boiled detective—an outsider to the industry, like the reader—penetrate studio walls, but he also illustrates how the “real” Hollywood increasingly resembled a movie set. Radio broadcast, the novels show, provided a

soundtrack for public events akin to that of a talkie, turning a star's "morals clause" into a political script to be performed in public spaces.

To inform my reading of more canonical texts (*The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West, *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler, and *The Wizard of Oz* directed by Victor Fleming—each released in 1939), my third chapter examines the rise of three-strip technicolor alongside the history of Southern California boosterism and white consumerism more broadly. West and Chandler attack the Southland booster campaigns that—with the help of the film industry—promoted health, leisure, and excitement to a white middle class. Characters in *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep* find themselves subjected to what I call a technicolor consciousness. Integrating literary archetypes from previous generations, the novels also lament the extent to which film adaptations discussed in the first two chapters caricature earlier Hollywood novels. *The Wizard of Oz*, on the other hand, self-reflexively adapts the industry's own technicolor depictions of Southern California from the mid-1930s to deliver a more allegorical critique of the film industry. In fact, the head screenwriter for *Oz*, Noel Langley, published a novel only two years after *Oz*'s release in which he portrays Hollywood as a wasteland. Illustrating my point regarding the critical lifespan of these literary works, Langley's novel has been entirely overlooked in spite of his screenwriting credit for one of the most popular films of all time. This chapter will be the first to acknowledge his piece critically in its historical and literary contexts.

My fourth and final chapter will consider the film noir of the 1940s and 1950s as the next step in the trajectory of Hollywood fiction. Film noir has been the subject of

much critical interest for the past few decades, but no piece of scholarship has sufficiently explained its ties to Hollywood fiction. Similar to the way the fiction from the first two chapters responds to film's technological limits, Chapter 4 considers film noir as reacting to the industry's technological abundance. For instance, both 1950 films *Sunset Boulevard* and *In A Lonely Place* include characters who explicitly mention the spectacle of technicolor film, as if to highlight their own anti-booster depiction of a black-and-white Hollywood. In part because of their visual grittiness, these films skillfully circumvent the industry's censorship codes to deliver more artistically sophisticated work. The emergence of this subversive style turned Hollywood into what some German filmmakers and intellectuals considered the Weimar on the Pacific. But if the earliest Hollywood novels used the guise of fiction to counter commercial images of a glamorous film industry, the bleakness of these popular Hollywood-on-Hollywood films may signal the death of the Hollywood novel in terms of its critical potential.

I conclude the dissertation by examining how the Hollywood novel has persisted post-studio and post-censorship. Joan Didion's postmodern novel *Play it as it Lays* (1970) serves as a kind of retelling of the extra-girl narrative from the 1920s. Set in a media-saturated environment, the novel features aspiring actress Maria Wyeth who identifies more with the fictional characters she plays than with a documentary version of herself. Understanding the Hollywood novel as having to reinvent itself with each major technological advancement in cinema during the reign of the studio system raises questions regarding the expiration date of the genre. How might the decline of the studio system beginning in the late 1940s threatened the relevance of the Hollywood novel?

“Movie Plots Pushed into Prose”:

The Extra Girl, Will Hays, and the Novel of Silent Hollywood

I.

Although something of a literary cliché by the time Nathanael West wrote *The Day of Locust* (1939), the story of a young woman seeking film stardom during the era of silent cinema provided a powerful generic tool for authors to express their frustrations with Hollywood in the 1920s. A handful of novels such as Harry Leon Wilson’s *Merton of the Movies* (1922) and George Randolph and Lilian Chester’s *On and Off the Lot* (1924) tell male-oriented success stories, but others including Beatrice Burton’s *The Hollywood Girl* (1927) and Stella G.S. Perry’s *The Extra-Girl* (1929) counter such optimistic depictions of the industry through the lens of their female protagonists. Often penned by women with firsthand experience in the movies, these novels view cinema’s lack of sound as implicated in the broader forms of silence surrounding women in Hollywood. I will argue that these novels work to amplify a voice of feminine struggle muted by the industry’s dominant narratives projected on screen and in promotional outlets off screen. This chapter focuses on two critically neglected novels that work to break the silence: *Minnie Flynn* by Frances Marion and *The Skyrocket* by Adela Rogers St. Johns, both published in 1925. With a thorough knowledge of the studios’ politics, Marion was the highest paid scenarist of her time and influentially “had the ear of Mary Pickford” (Koszarski 239), while St. Johns, who wrote mostly for newspapers and fan magazines, was “[p]erhaps the most prolific author of Hollywood fiction in the 1920s” (Springer 118). Implicitly privileging the print medium amid a burgeoning visual culture,

Marion, St. Johns, and other likeminded writers sought to undermine the industry's welcoming image that had proved foundational to its consumer base in the 1910s.

In 1976 Budd Schulberg, son of industry mogul B.P. Schulberg and author of *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941), specifically named *The Skyrocket* in his dismissal of early Hollywood fiction, describing such novels as “a collection of used movie plots pushed into prose” that tended “to inspire insipid tales with sentimental turning points and happy endings to match the splendid bathos that MGM, Universal and Fox could foist upon us” (Q3). But his diatribe ignores the extent to which the novels existed within a complex intertextual network made up of film narratives, film technology, censorship, fan magazines and newspapers, and studios working to contain the movie-crazed fan they had created in the 1910s. To indulge Schulberg's critique nevertheless, I will consider the way *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* actually took their cue from narratives already authorized by the studios. By reading the novels alongside Mack Sennett's silent comedy *The Extra Girl* (1923, not to be confused with the novel of the same name mentioned previously) to anchor my discussion, I will further argue that *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* should be understood as adaptations and revisions of their contemporary Hollywood-on-Hollywood films rather than, as Schulberg implies, promotional novelizations of them.³ My choice to focus on *The Extra Girl* is all the more appropriate given the film's star, Mabel Normand, whose career around this time was waning due to her ties to William Desmond Taylor's still-unsolved murder in 1922. Marion and St. Johns, both good friends of Normand's, advocated her innocence and criticized the

³ Highlighting its comedy-oriented narrative, *The Extra Girl* was originally titled *Millie of the Movies*—a clear play on *Merton of the Movies*.

system that “had placed her on the highest pedestal” only to “dra[g] her down like a pack of hyenas” (St. Johns, *Love, Laughter* 66).

The figure of the extra girl had already been a subject of scrutiny in the public’s imagination when a year earlier comic actor Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle was accused of the rape and murder of actress Virginia Rappe. Once portrayed by the press as the quintessential extra girl “who beat the odds alone” (Hallett 181), Rappe’s posthumous depiction during Arbuckle’s trial reduced her to a “pathetic fallen woman who reaped what she had sown” (Hallett 210). Arbuckle’s wife, actress Minta Arbuckle, found herself subjected to a similar, albeit less extreme, opprobrium. With the ongoing threat of federal censorship over film production, the scandal prompted the industry to elect former Postmaster General Will Hays to clean up Hollywood’s image. After Hays banned Arbuckle’s films from theaters to show he meant business, studio heads viewed Minta Arbuckle as a kind of extension of her husband and refused to hire someone whose name had become synonymous with scandal. Suddenly without work, she wrote to Hays personally asking for help:

Now that Mr. [Adolph] Zukor’s studio is in full blast again and as long as my letters to him have never been answered [I] was wondering whether you could help me out in securing work with him. I realize you are very close to him. Really need it for both reasons financially and mentally. Have tried many times to secure engagement but all were afraid you would ban me also ... Feel just a little hurt at the attitudes of people when

they need you you must be ready but when you ask anything in return you are so soon forgotten. (Indiana)

I will therefore insist that while the studios produced film versions of the extra-girl narrative to reduce the surplus of aspirants in Hollywood, the female novelists aimed to keep women away from an industry that was, on the one hand, scandalously embalming youth for profit and, on the other, ousting those whose ties to scandal—no matter how ill-founded or tangential—threatened the industry’s revenue.⁴ These novels show women suffering at each level of Hollywood’s social hierarchy—from extra, to movie star, to has-been—and criticize the fickle attitude of an industry that sold itself as democratic in the 1910s, yet suddenly had a change of heart once female extras and stars alike turned into more of a commotion than a commodity. By dealing with the trajectory of fame, *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* adapt the reductive cultural narrative beginning to emerge around not only the extra girl but also female stars, whose links to scandals silenced their former success stories in the industry. Whether an extra or a star, the novels demonstrate, women in 1920s Hollywood were haunted by the nostalgic fantasy of a place that had frequently promoted and encouraged ambition for women in the 1910s.

Christopher Ames, in his book *Movies About the Movies*, argues that self-reflective Hollywood movies—*A Star is Born* (1937), *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), and *The*

⁴ In her autobiography, Marion explains her concern for young women quite clearly: “[H]ordes of young people immediately rushed from every state to pound on studio gates. . . . [T]he majority of [young women] came alone and were willing to pay any price for foothold at the studios. These were the girls who disturbed us most; few had any real talent, and the pretty faces of frustrated youth faded quickly. Daily they were turned away . . . Hunger began taking its count, and despair made them vulnerable to the advances of men who paid them enough to live on temporarily. We, who were in our mid-twenties, urged these kids to return home before it was too late. They laughed at us and said that we were jealous of their youth” (*Off With!* 22).

Star (1952), to name a few—“cannot truly take us behind the camera, behind the screen, or behind the myth” (13), and are therefore incapable of engendering critical awareness of Hollywood as a capitalist enterprise. If Hollywood-on-Hollywood films “naturally celebrate the medium they interrogate” (Ames 9), I want to understand the novels’ print medium as a very basic indication of their attempt to invert the visual medium of Hollywood. Marion conceived of her novel as an opportunity “to develo[p] complex characters through dialogue,” which differed considerably from her experience of writing silent film scenarios that consisted only of “the action and pantomime situations required for the screen” (Beauchamp 154). One of the most significant ways the novels take advantage of their form is by privileging voice over image in their written representation, countering film’s technology that lacked synchronized sound. My use of the term “voice” in relation to writing may seem counterintuitive since, like silent films, novels ostensibly lack sound as well. Here I turn to James Phelan who asserts that “[t]he concept of voice involves not just a metaphor, in which writing gets treated as speech, but also a learnable kind of synesthesia: as we see words on a page we can hear sounds” (138). Silent films included intertitles, of course, but the appearance of print on the screen functioned differently than print on a page. Early filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith, as historian Lary May explains, sought to keep intertitles to a minimum. Part of film’s popularity, after all, came from its promise of a “universal language,” a medium that “everyone could comprehend” regardless of educational or national background (May 72).

While the print medium highlights the authors’ efforts to interrogate rather than celebrate the film medium, it also goes hand in hand with the feminist content of the

novels. Seminal visual theorists John Berger and Laura Mulvey have famously argued that the image of the female in Western culture assumes—and thus belongs to—a masculine spectator.⁵ Drawing on Mulvey, Robert J. Corber has more recently claimed that silent film accentuates the male gaze by “separating [the female body] from the female voice” (118). For Corber, silent film’s “exaggerated gestures and facial expressions used to compensate for the lack of sound” elicited what Tom Gunning has termed “the cinema of attractions”—an early form of film rooted in exhibitionism akin to a “fairground attraction” (Gunning 385). Such claims complicate Dorothy Richardson’s early essay from 1932, “The Film Gone Male,” where Richardson argued that the sound film—what she called “a medium of propaganda” endorsing “a masculine destiny”—obscured the “innocence” of silent film that “was essentially feminine” (206-7). Richardson saw women’s act of speaking as a “façade” “to cover ... their own palpitating spiritual nakedness” amongst men, making silent film a “gracious” reflection of women’s “awareness of being” (206). Still, as Karen Ward Mahar contends in her book *Women Filmmakers in Early Hollywood* (2006), the studio system by the 1920s operated under a “masculinized business culture” with centralized production and “rigid division of labor” (134). Unlike the female directors of the 1910s, “stereotyped as soft, emotional, and intuitive,” the studio system by the 1920s reflected the “leadership and discipline” of its male directors (198). Shelley Stamp likewise notes that women who held prominent

⁵ For Berger, who draws on the historical traditions of European paintings, “the image of the woman is designed to flatter” the ideal male spectator (64). Mulvey, working in cinema studies, similarly sees the female body as “continually stolen and used for” the purposes of the male gaze (68). While “the active male figure” in a film’s narrative “demands a three-dimensional space,” the woman remains confined to a two dimensional image onscreen (63), “play[ing] to and signif[y]ing male desire” for the film’s protagonist and spectator alike (62).

positions in the industry during the 1910s “lost considerable power [in the early 1920s] with the consolidation of the major studios and the rise of exclusionary professional guilds” (347). Therefore, although silent film might underscore a feminine aesthetic, as Richardson argued, the novels depict the studio system as a patriarchal institution that tended to view “the female body ... as a fetish object” (Corber 118).

As if to anticipate the theoretical approach of Berger, Mulvey, and Corber, Marion and St. Johns demonstrate in their writing how institutionalized practices of objectifying the female body extend from the silent screen to everyday life. Actresses off screen are almost always reduced to “empty shell[s]” (Marion, *Minnie Flynn* 382) or “living mannequins” (Marion, *Off With!* 92). By forgoing the visual, these novels attempted to inscribe a language of resistance geared toward an assumed female readership, one that spoke against “the language of the dominant patriarchal order” propagated in and by popular film (Mulvey 59). In fact, *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* self-reflexively insinuate that their female protagonists fall prey to the patriarchal industry partly because they undermine the value of novels. Early in the story, Minnie Flynn tries to pass the time by reading, but “the fine print” of the book “hurt[s] her eyes.” She instead prefers “star[ing] into space, reviewing as in a daze her experiences at the studio” (155). And in stark contrast to her roommate, whose studiousness allow her to see through the Hollywood illusion, Sharon Kimm’s interest in reading extends only to “the fame and fortune of picture stars” (*The Skyrocket* 43) since “[n]obody had ever taught [her] to love books” (262). Because neither Minnie nor Sharon care to read, the novels imply, their perception of themselves and the world around them is easily molded by men

“who contro[l] the[ir] actions . . . without their half suspecting his influence” (*The Skyrocket* 30).

The novels, under the guise of fiction, ironically spoke with fewer constraints than newspapers and fan magazines that generically deemed themselves more credible. For St. Johns, putting Hollywood in fiction “was the only way in which you could print the truth” (St. Johns, *Honeycomb* 136). Marion once expressed a similar paradox, describing *Minnie Flynn* as a “statement of facts in fiction” (“The Real Truth”). In spite of their links to magazine culture,⁶ *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* self-consciously situate themselves in opposition to it. A chapter on protagonist Sharon’s tragic upbringing ends by noting that the “expert hands” of the press will report “only the best of [her childhood], cleansed and polished” (28), while a fan magazine similarly reduces Minnie’s impoverished background to a “beautiful pampered childhood” (215).

Given the relative obscurity of the novels, it is not surprising that they and others like them have garnered such little critical interest. Still, the literary representation of the extra girl has inspired noteworthy scholarship, most centrally John Parris Springer’s *Hollywood Fictions: The Dream Factory in American Popular Literature* (2000). The extra-girl narrative of the 1920s, Springer argues, “offered a cultural vehicle both for the representation of ‘feminine’ desire and for its containment by the familiar ideologies of patriarchal culture.” Although these works often portrayed women as “taking control over

⁶ Marion and St. Johns published serialized versions of their novels in literary magazines, but the novels were published as standalone books before the final magazine installment appeared. Further, if St. Johns’s fan magazine fiction and non-fiction “clearly serve[d] the star and studio systems” (337), as scholar Anne Morey asserts, *The Skyrocket*’s initial appearance in *Cosmopolitan* suggests its dissociation from press outlets explicitly linked to the industry.

their lives by choosing career over marriage,” he contends that the fiction ultimately reinforced Victorian values of femininity, which were situated “against the modern sexual and social changes represented by the movie star” (125). Springer describes *The Skyrocket*’s ending as indicative of its “conservative impulse” because it implicitly “punishes women for their career ambitions” at a time when women were redefining their place in the social sphere (124). He acknowledges that novels in the vein of *Minnie Flynn*, in contrast to *The Skyrocket*’s “artificial happy ending” (124), “eschew the romantic mythology of fan magazines” through their bleak endings; but for Springer even these darker moments partake in the conservative impulse by eliciting an “*equally mythologized* view of film stars as captives of their privileged lives” (125; emphasis added). Springer’s move to add the fiction to the industry’s vast promotional apparatus, or mythology, needs rethinking. After all, 1920s films telling the story of the extra girl, as I will show, share similar if not identical conservative agendas. What in this context distinguishes Springer’s understanding of Hollywood fiction from Hollywood-on-Hollywood films? His failure to address the relationship between the novels and their concurrent Hollywood-on-Hollywood films ultimately leads to the problematic implication that the novelists and studios worked in tandem. In many ways, his description of these novels as conservative resonates with Schulberg’s claim that they are merely movie plots pushed into prose.

Although relatively ignored in literary criticism, the extra girl in Hollywood has recently inspired much historical scholarship. Hilary Hallett’s 2013 study on early Hollywood details women’s role in constructing what she refers to as the “social

imaginary” of the film industry. In the years preceding the industry’s scandals, she explains, women who made up the majority of scenarists and press writers used their influential positions to promote Hollywood as a place of ambition for young women. Since silent film in the 1910s catered largely to a female audience, Hollywood as the place of film production became “perhaps the most powerful generator and lure for a New Western Woman in full flight of feminine norms” (11). Both within the industry and on screen, actresses from Mary Pickford to Gloria Swanson publicly challenged patriarchal dominance of an increasingly corporatized industry, showing that “feminine charm and public authority [could] coexist[]” (42). Such feminine energy served as the platform for the concept of the extra girl, a figure “who went west in search of unparalleled opportunities for self-invention, artistic exploration, professional advancement, romantic adventures, and just plain fun” (17).

And the industry certainly promoted itself as a place for just plain fun. The East Coast housed the first film studios in the U.S., but Los Angeles by 1915 proudly accommodated “the largest and best-equipped motion-picture studio in the world” (Kingsley, “At the Stage”). Carl Laemmle’s grand unveiling of Universal City in 1915, popularly referred to as the world’s “first city made exclusively for the making of motion pictures” (Winchester 124), helped to feed the public’s growing curiosity around film production. With its “fresh paint and stucco gleaming in the California sunshine” (Koszarski 6), journalists likened Universal Studios’ opening to that of the White City of Chicago’s 1893 World’s Fair. To stress its endorsement of the New Woman, the studio provided “a day-care center and a school for workers’ children,” which for Hallett

reflected the studio's efforts "to support women's physical and occupational mobility" (78-79). The reported 20,000 visitors looked forward to rubbing shoulders with the stars they had come to know on screen, while others had the more urgent desire to appear *on* screen. Motion picture directors, so the myth went, could potentially discover the talents of an extra on set who would then go on to achieve fame and fortune. Actress Mary MacLaren, whose visit to Universal accelerated her journey to fame, provided credibility to the myth (Stamp 336). Many newspapers and magazines regularly reminded readers of the big stars whose careers began in extra work, most notably Pickford during her time at Biograph. *Times* writer Grace Kingsley, who also wrote for *Photoplay*, specifically credits Universal Studios in 1914 for discovering "many good people among 'extras'" and concludes her piece with the hopeful quote: "All managers agree that it is difficult to keep good extra moving-picture people ... as they graduate to the regular [studio] stage after gaining motion picture experience" (Kingsley, "How Famous").

In spite of the extra's ties to independence and social mobility, however, the actual labor of the extra in some ways reinforced male dominance. A key reason the "the extra [narrative] ... assumed a female face during the 1910s," as Denise McKenna illustrates, had much to do with the employment's "associations with unskilled labour, transience, and low wages, all of which were historical hallmarks of women's labour." Because extra work in the movies connoted an "escape from real work," the extra's labor remained highly feminized due to the pay that "could not be considered adequate for a responsible family man" (12). If male extras were not taken seriously in the social world, McKenna's study helps to explain why so much of the more critical Hollywood fiction of

the 1920s dealt with the affliction of movie-struck women.⁷ For these reasons, the romanticized image of the extra girl in the public's imagination, Shelley Stamp argues, "muted women's labor ... for they emphasized passive acts of waiting" instead of the regular struggles for adequate work (342). Extras endured relatively low daily wages and intense working conditions because of the promise of stardom that awaited them (Stamp 341). Although the industry needed a large and diverse cast of extras to make up the background of scenes, no single studio "could provide regular or steady employment for such a large labor pool" (Stamp 334), resulting in an overwhelming surplus of under- or unemployed bodies in the Los Angeles area.⁸

Perhaps reflecting the disruptiveness of the ever-growing number of arrivals, Laemmle's profoundly successful method of showcasing the studio proved difficult to sustain. Universal closed its gates to the public in 1917 and only granted admittance sporadically in the following years.⁹ All over Hollywood the huge number of extras—especially young women who felt that "[o]nly a personal visit to a studio would suffice" in their quest for fame—became a source of anxiety for the studios and civic leaders alike. As historian Anthony Slide notes, "offices of studio casting directors were mobbed,

⁷ Harry Leon Wilson's 1922 novel *Merton of the Movies*, which features a male extra as the protagonist, is widely regarded as a comedy partly because of Merton's cluelessness, but his acting pursuits further divorce him from traditional notions of masculinity. A casting director at a movie studio tells him, "I wouldn't discourage a nice clean boy like you for the world, but there are a lot of people in pictures right now that would prefer a steady job like that one you left" (62), referring to his sales clerk position in Illinois.

⁸ Stamp cites an article from the *Los Angeles Times* that describes the extras who regularly "socialize[d] near the corner of Hollywood and Cahuenga" (334). Heidi Kenaga explains that the amount of physical bodies had material ramifications: "[W]omen moving toward Hollywood strained the behavioral norms of the teens and the 1920s to the extent that such a surveilling, correcting site like the Studio Club was necessary" (134-5).

⁹ A June 1920s *Los Angeles Times* article read, "For the first time in thirty months Universal City will be thrown wide open to the public this afternoon" ("Like Old Days").

not just early in the morning but throughout the day” (*Hollywood Unknowns* 26). Further, the extras who actually made their way into studio gates and in front of the camera did not always yield favorable results. Studio manager B.P. Fineman, for instance, once complained of inexperienced extras “often spoil[ing] expensive scenes, which ha[d] to be discarded” (qtd. in *Hollywood Unknowns* 29). The general concern over the extras persisted through the publications of *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket*; Fred Beetson, the head of Hays’s public relations office in Hollywood, wrote to Hays in 1925 informing him of the extras who might “assume an exalted idea of their importance in the industry and consider themselves artists, which of course they are not.”

Thus while Hallett largely attributes the abrupt silence in the industry’s optimism around the New Woman to Rappe’s death,¹⁰ it is also important to remember that the industry had already been struggling to contain the excess of movie-struck women.¹¹ Suggesting the ongoing conflict leading up to the scandals, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce in 1921 began publishing ads in newspapers and magazines that bluntly exclaimed: “Don’t Try to Break into the Movies” followed by the bleak statistic: “Out of 100,000 persons who started at the bottom of the screen’s ladder of fame, only five reached the top” (Torrence 88). Even Pickford, whom Hallett credits as central to promoting the democratization of fame, advised a crowd of 20,000 in Los Angeles to “have sufficient funds to live on for at least five years” before pursuing a career in the

¹⁰ Hallett writes, “No longer would the industry’s celebrity culture spin such unabashedly romantic adventure stories about the glories awaiting ambitious female migrants ... along Hollywood’s streets” (184).

¹¹ As Stamp notes, “such concern arose much earlier, well before scandalous headlines and economic downturned rocked Hollywood in the early 1920s” (346).

movies (Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 34). In spite of the scandals and blatant warnings, however, the residual effects of industry's optimism nevertheless continued to circulate. According to *Southern California Business* magazine, 1923 marked the peak year of arrivals with an average of 100,000 visitors arriving per month (qtd. in Klein 77)—not incidentally the same year Hays began plans for the Hollywood Studio Club.

Attempts to reduce the number of arrivals also materialized in short- and feature-length films as well as fan magazine contests. As a result of the industry's patriarchal remodeling, these systematic efforts began depicting women as foolish, irresponsible dreamers. In August 1922 Hays sent a memo to MPPDA members, telling them that “[t]here is some way that the story of the motion picture itself can by motion pictures be given to the public” (Indiana). Hays's endorsement here combined with the lingering impact of studio tourism gave way to a series of short films that positioned the viewer as a visitor on a backlot, with Paramount's 1922 short “A Trip to Paramountown” beginning the trend and MGM and Universal following suit in 1925.¹² *Exhibitors Herald* magazine ensured theater owners that “A Trip to Paramountown” would “please audiences and prove a strong drawing attention to any picture” (Quigley 42). Notably, Paramount provided the short to theaters “free of charge”: “Ask your exchange for a print,” one theater owner advised his peers, “You'll get it” (Hillyer 78).

The difference between these shorts and an actual tour of the studio, of course, was that the fan's physical presence on the backlot was not required. As if to downplay

¹² According to film scholar Mark Shiel, Universal's 1915 short, “Behind the Screen,” was the earliest studio tour film (139). Given the contrasting contexts of “Behind the Screen” and such shorts as “A Trip to Paramountown,” however, the former seems to be more inviting than the latter.

any sense of excitement, the studios in the shorts appear bland in comparison to the press coverage of the previous decade that celebrated the “white facades of great business buildings” amid the “the beautiful valley and hill country” (Kingsley, “Universal City”).¹³ But while the filmed studio tours might have appealed the common tourist who merely sought a glimpse behind the screen, they could not meet the demand of the aspiring actress who wanted to appear *on* screen, to penetrate what St. Johns calls “the impassable gate” (*Skyrocket* 126). She couldn’t be discovered by passively watching movies in a theater; she had to seek stardom actively. But how could studio heads wield such determination and persistence to their benefit?

In 1921, the same year as the Chamber of Commerce’s plea and Arbuckle’s trial, mogul Samuel Goldwyn began publishing articles in *Photoplay* championing the need for new faces in the industry.¹⁴ Other fan magazines like *Motion Picture Magazine* held similar “Fame and Fortune” contests around this time, one of which allegedly started Clara Bow’s career, but Goldwyn’s *Photoplay* contest held particular esteem because of the hype and power behind it. After four months of strategic stalling, Goldwyn finally announced a contest in *Photoplay*’s March 1922 issue, asking young women “over sixteen years of age, who are not professional actresses” to submit photographs of themselves to be judged by Goldwyn himself and Quirk. Rather than receiving the meager payment of an extra, the ad explains, the winner would “receive a salary equal to

¹³ As film historian Richard Koszarski observes, the films “constantly deemphasiz[e] the glamour of the studio’s employees and underscor[e] the tight, pyramidal control exercised by the top executives” (110).

¹⁴ Thanks to Anthony Slide for bringing this contest to my attention in his book *Inside the Hollywood Fan Magazine* (94).

that of being paid competent actresses” and sign “a year’s contract to Goldwyn Pictures.” Goldwyn Pictures would fund the transportation “of the winner and her mother to and from the studios at Culver City, California” (“Terms of Contest” 24). As this last line makes clear, such a contest could keep the dream of stardom alive while also keeping the movie-struck women in their bedrooms rather than at the studio gates.¹⁵

As if to combine the short films and the fan magazine contests, studios released feature-length films that also took place on backlots with female protagonists, including Paramount’s *Hollywood*, Goldwyn Pictures’s *Souls for Sale*, and Sennett’s *The Extra Girl* (each 1923). To stress Hays’s presence in these stunts, director James Cruze produced *Hollywood*—adapted from Frank Condon’s short story published in *Photoplay*—at the “specific[] request” of the Hays Office (Starr 336). A kind of extended version of “A Trip to Paramountown,” *Hollywood* articulated a “gentle warning to female fans” in its “satir[e] of women’s professional ambitions” (Hallett 216) and featured Arbuckle “in his last on-screen role having the door of a casting office slammed shut in his face” (Starr 336).

In a similar vein, Sennett began production for *The Extra Girl* in response to “the great number of tourist visitors who daily appl[ied] for admittance” to his studio. The film, like others taking place on backlots, promised to show audiences “a pictorial explanation of the actual happenings in and about a studio” (“Sennett Films”), in theory

¹⁵ Further, the strategy fundamentally prefigured Hays’s idea of the Central Casting Bureau where, instead of “la[y]ing] siege to studio gates in an effort to get work,” extras had to telephone the office for their potential assignment (Segrave 64). Included on the list of the Central Casting’s official incentives was to “discourage the constantly increasing influx of persons as extras in the industry” (qtd. in Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 65).

demystifying the process of motion picture production while paradoxically mediating the “first-hand” experience. Like the “basic pattern” of flapper films that “virtually every studio” rehashed throughout the 1920s (Studlar 281), *The Extra Girl* tells the story of Sue Graham (played by Mabel Normand), a young woman from the Midwest who dreams of movie stardom despite her conservative family’s wishes. After Sue inadvertently submits a fake picture to a movie contest she comes across in a fan magazine, a film studio pays for her travels to Hollywood. Upon her arrival, the male studio manager realizes Sue’s face does not match the woman from the original contest-winning photo. He subsequently assigns her dull tasks around the studio such as sewing costumes and sweeping the floors. Meanwhile, David Giddings, Sue’s hometown sweetheart, has followed her to Hollywood, where he builds sets for the same film company. Sue eventually has a chance at a screen test, but she fails miserably after a series of comedic mishaps. The film ends by showing Sue and David, now married, in their living room with a toddler son watching the old footage of Sue’s screen test. When Sue’s son sees his mother kissing the actor on screen, he asks, “Daddy, who is that man kissing mommy?” Sue’s past involvement in movies suggests a lower moral standard for women, in opposition to the proprieties of the nuclear family. She appears content in her new life, but she nevertheless watches the projection of herself some years earlier with a kind of eagerness and wistful longing. Still, the ending constitutes a happy one, affirming Sue’s choice of motherhood over a career in the movies. She cannot, the film implies, pursue

both successfully. Sue tells David, “Dearest, to hear him call me mamma means more than the greatest career I might ever have had.”¹⁶

That *The Extra Girl* tells motion-picture tourists the story of a naïve young woman further stresses the point that the two figures—the motion-picture tourist and the extra girl—were reputed pests who disrupted business and the city in general. Indeed, Sennett’s working titles for the film included “Why Girls Should Stay Home” and “When Mother Was Young and Foolish” (Mack Sennett Papers).¹⁷ One might argue that the film’s integration of the fan magazine contest pokes fun at Samuel Goldwyn’s publicity stunt, but it more seriously criticizes the woman who invests her faith in such contests. *The Extra Girl*, rather than mocking the industry, ultimately mocks those who expect to attain stardom easily or at all. In one press release, Sennett expressed his hope that the film would show viewers that “the place for a girl not versatile in the art of emotion, is at home or in some other institution other than a moving picture studio” (Mack Sennett Papers).

¹⁶ Shiel calls Sennett’s film “fairly moralistic” as it supported the cause of the many “Christian conservatives” who occupied Hollywood at the time of its release (186-87).

¹⁷ When Hays asked studios to donate money for the construction of the Studio Club, Sennett evidently refused to participate in the industry-wide stunt. In the process of collecting funds, Thomas Patten telegraphed Hays from Hollywood, telling Hays, “There is about \$10,000 more which . . . can [be] raise[d] by large subscriptions here. This will include Mack Sennett, Harold Lloyd, Chaplin, etc.” Hays kept a close eye on the contributors and even asked Patten “why Harold Lloyd was not on the list of those who contributed to Studio Club” (Indiana). In spite of Hays’s peer pressuring, Sennett’s name does not appear on a final list of contributors, suggesting his opposition to an organization that would only mask the problem of the extra girl. Indeed, one might consider *The Extra Girl* as his backhanded contribution to the Studio Club, as if he thought of the film as attacking the issue at the root.

II.

Frances Marion's early rejection at Sennett's studio in 1914 as well as her close friendship with Normand makes her familiarity with and even personal stake in *The Extra Girl* difficult to deny (Beauchamp 30-31). Originally titled *The Rise and Fall of Minnie Flynn*, Marion's novel extends the narrative of *The Extra Girl* to turn Sennett's critique of the young woman onto the industry itself. *Minnie Flynn* achieves this thematic shift by depicting a protagonist whose "beautiful voice" is, as she once described actress Doris Kenyon, "silenced by the movies" (Marion, *Off With!* 96). Finding the process of adapting lengthy realist novels into silent films "foolish," Marion no doubt conceived of her four-hundred-page novel as a piece that would avoid "the typical movie pattern" (Marion, *Off With* 168).

Covering over a decade, *Minnie Flynn* opens in 1914, where Minnie lives with her parents, brothers, and sister in a cramped New York apartment. In what sounds similar to Lary May's discussion of the shifting gender codes that coincided with the rise of mass culture, the novel foregrounds the social presence of the so-called New Woman in order to demonstrate how the movie industry ironically restricts its actresses from practicing it. Early on, Minnie explains modern male-female relationships to her mother: "You got a lot of old-fashioned ideas in your head about marriage, and you don't seem to see that things is different now than they used to. ... Billy and me saw a picture about a couple startin' out on a fifty-fifty plan ... We talked about it on the way home and Billy says it's exactly how we'll do it, ma, just like a couple o' pals. No, none o' that old slave stuff for Billy and me" (23). Watching the silent screen inspires Minnie to break from

Victorian traditions of domesticity, but as the novel will go on to show, these projected images conceal the gender dynamics behind their production, obscuring the extent to which liberatory modes of femininity remain caught up in patriarchal structures of power.¹⁸ What Minnie refers to as the “old slave stuff” will soon resurface on the backlots where one male director compares “the restless line” of female extras to sheep in a herd (133). She fails to realize the male approval by which she measures her newfound femininity.

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, Minnie stands outside of Sullivan’s saloon—a bar full of male customers—and stares at her reflection in the window. Unlike the unflattering reflection on the fashion store window where she works nearby or the “piece of broken mirror” at home (57), “[t]he plate-glass window of Sullivan’s saloon was to Minnie like the warming smile of a good-looking man. . . . Minnie loved herself when she looked in this window” (8). Invoking the male gaze, Minnie “watches [herself] being looked at” by the men on the other side of the storefront and, in so doing, “turns herself into an object” (Berger 47). The men sitting in a noisy bar watch Minnie as they would a silent movie. Unable to return the voyeuristic gaze of the male spectators inside, she internalizes her reflection as both natural and ideal as it elicits a heightened version of herself, one she will spend the novel trying to fulfill. She observes “her figure delicately soft and rounded, the ugly suit pastelled in shadows, her gloveless hands little and white

¹⁸ Paula Marantz Cohen, in *Silent Film and the Triumph of the American Myth*, explains that silent films “made possible an elasticity in the conception of self that each viewer took away from the experience of watching them” (16). The uninspired automatons on the movie set in *Minnie Flynn* ironically differ from those who will later watch the footage in a movie theater for the purposes of conceiving of the self.

... looked like two lilies on long waving stalks” (8). Minnie “hate[s]” what she sees in “the narrow mirrors of the shop windows” where she works (8) in spite of her outspoken pride in her financial self-sufficiency, suggesting her preference for a self-image constructed by a male spectator rather than one more associated with progressive femininity. That she rejects her reflection in the window of a New York fashion store—a business that promotes a modern image for women—continues to illustrate her impulse to disregard the very thing she supposedly advocates.

Given the novel’s subject matter, the “frames” (8) of the windows in these early passages clearly parallel those of a film screen and foreshadow the more serious dangers to come.¹⁹ Similar to the men in the saloon who objectify Minnie, men in the film industry understand a woman’s appearance in terms of financial and sexual profit. “Men like that,” Hal Deane tells Minnie at one point, “only value women for what they get out of them” (207). One night at a party with her hometown sweetheart Billy MacNally, Minnie graciously accepts film actor Al Kessler’s invitation to act in the movies. Kessler has “been around the studios long enough to know how well [Minnie’s] features would photograph” (59) and tells her family that “[h]er nose will be something wonderful on the screen. So straight, and yet it gives the impression that it tips up a little bit. Sassy, that’s the word” (62). As Kessler’s remarks make clear, Minnie’s value hinges entirely upon her physical appearance. She soon starts acting as an extra at a studio in Fort Lee, New Jersey—the same city where Mabel Normand’s acting career began. Once she stands next to other actresses on set, however, Kessler second-guesses her value: “She had looked all

¹⁹ For more on the historical link between compositional framing and film screens, see Stephen Heath’s chapter “Narrative Space” in his book *Questions of Cinema* (1981).

right in the Harlem Dance Hall but among those well-dressed girls at the studio she was embarrassingly out of date; cheap” (83).

The emphasis on the female body image helps to explain why Eleanor, a more seasoned actress, introduces Minnie to the film camera with such intensity. Eleanor tells Minnie, “Take a good look at it. It’s like a living thing. Do you know why? Because it can be your best friend or your worst enemy. God, but it’s cruel” (86). An actress’s surface image, what the all-powerful camera captures, dictates her success—a fate in the hands of a machine that can see more than the human eye:

[Eleanor] talked about the camera in such dread tones, about its power to make you or destroy you, with what diabolical cruelty it shows up every little defect in your face, how it catches every hidden thought and reveals it upon the screen, that she personified it so that Minnie felt a growing awe for it. She looked up into the steel face as it leaned over her and saw its cold unblinking glass eyes looking down, passive in its terrible power.

(87)

Eleanor clearly refers to the camera technique of the close-up made popular in Hollywood by director D.W. Griffith. Like the qualities of a masculine spectator watching a silent movie, the camera “hear[s] nothing but see[s] everything” and “passes judgment only on contours” (*Minnie Flynn* 188). Early film theorist Béla Balázs once called the close-up the “magnifying glass of the film camera” (*Early Film Theory* 38), achieving a vantage point that exposed “the bottom of the soul by means of such tiny movements of facial muscles which even the most observant partner would never

perceive” (*Theory of the Film* 63). However, as Eleanor’s panic indicates, men behind the camera could use the close-up as a weapon against young women in front of the camera. In his screen tests, for instance, Griffith looked to actresses who appeared in “perfect health” and enlarged their faces by “twenty times” (qtd. in May 76). He would dismiss actresses with “blemishes on their faces” since the imperfections “indicated jealousy, greed, or sexual vice” (76). By illuminating the gendered technological barriers alienating the performer from the audience, and the performer from her own image,²⁰ *Minnie Flynn* complicates the common scholarly assertion that the public’s demand largely influenced the industry’s output.²¹ The actresses here gear their performance for the all-seeing camera and the few men who control it rather than the audiences who will later watch the footage in movie houses. Figures like Minnie, instead of “shap[ing] themselves to the needs of their audience” (Cohen 14), focus more on achieving—and then sustaining—fame by meeting the demands of the men in charge. The close-up on the silent screen projects not the bottom of her soul, as Balázs praises, but a highly constructed image that ironically comes at the cost of her soul, so to speak.

Marion further elucidates the link between men and the camera when Minnie signs her movie contract under her new screen name, June Day. In the presence of a newspaper photographer, ruthless director George Beauregard tells her, “Lean over . . . then look into the camera and smile. No, I guess it’s better if you look at *me* and smile”

²⁰ Marion’s brief experience as an extra around 1917 further highlights her critique of the camera as eliciting an alienating force. Upon watching herself on screen, she fails to recognize the “tall, gawky girl whose waving arms looked like two busy windmills, a stranger who made a few grimaces and then dashed off again” (qtd. in Beauchamp 42).

²¹ See Thomas Schatz’s *Genius of the System* (37) and Chip Rhodes’s *Politics, Desire, and the Hollywood Novel* (2).

(173; emphasis in original). Not only does the photographer's direction continue to stress the fabrication of newsprint, but Minnie's relationship to the camera quite directly parallels her relationship to Beauregard in this scene. The camera and Beauregard are interchangeable in their ability to regulate Minnie's actions. While another director teaches Minnie "how to give expression physically to the artificial emotions required" for film shooting, Beauregard teaches Minnie "the artifices of social relationships" (194). In other words, he teaches Minnie to internalize the male gaze of the film camera so that she will continue living the onscreen fiction in her real life for the sake of publicity. As per Beauregard's plan, working for the movies soon begins to taint Minnie's understanding of her private life as she "furnishe[s her apartment] to look like the sets built at the studio" (219). Her second wedding to actor Gilbert Carlton even resembles "a scene in a moving picture. It *was* a moving picture" (313; emphasis in original).

The industry's practice of chewing up a woman's image and spitting it out upon the first sign of aging culminates with Eleanor's suicide later in the novel. The camera, as Eleanor feared, eventually destroys her. Despite her pleas to Minnie for help, she fails to find adequate work. Eleanor's physical deterioration equates directly to her declining success as a film star. Her filmic representation supersedes her to such a degree that if her image no longer exists on screen, she can no longer exist off screen. Immediately after learning of Eleanor's suicide, Beauregard plans to turn her funeral into a kind of commercial spectacle. He tells Minnie, "[P]oor little Eleanor ... We've got to do everything in our power to make her funeral a success. I'll turn out the whole studio if necessary. ... I want all the papers to run the story and give Eleanor a lot of praise" (241).

Eleanor's body, even in death, can be exploited for publicity purposes to benefit the studio. Beauregard treats the funeral more as a movie premiere and beams at his "enormous gay wreath [that] leaned drunkenly against the table which held the coffin ... [It was] the largest and most expensive wreath which the florist ... had ever made up, something [Beauregard] took pride in" (242). Indeed, the moment she can no longer speak also marks her total absorption into the industry as her corpse blends into the cinematic spectacle of the funeral.

Hard-boiled director Hal Deane, a Harvard graduate whose background in science points to his rationality in the novel, proves the least corrupt male in the industry. Contrary to all the other men, Deane acknowledges that males in the movie business "did not degenerate so quickly as the women. ... The women, hungering for praise, self-adornment, satisfied vanities, were more readily unbalanced. Success, depending entirely upon their physical features, was too short-lived" (190). As he struggles with his own sense of power as a male director, he at one point takes advantage of Minnie's emotions during a film shoot after Eleanor's suicide. "He ordered them at the studio to prepare for the so-called 'sad scenes' to be taken," but then berates himself: "What an ass I am!" (242).

He resolves his internal conflict by giving Minnie her own diary, which he hopes will allow her to reclaim her sense of self in the face of fame. Upon receiving it, she responds skeptically: "I'm no novelist.... What's the idea? Want to develop a new talent in me? Getting tired of making an actress out of me?" He refuses to let Minnie's work as an actress completely silence her off-screen identity and tells her that keeping a diary will

allow her to “have some record of your footsteps, to be sure whether they’re marching forward, upward, or if they are traveling zigzag and starting downhill.... Everybody’s cheating Minnie Flynn—don’t *you* cheat her!” (296; emphasis in original). If Minnie keeps a diary that serves as a “record”—or *recording*—of her voice, Deane figures, she can keep a part of herself that the cameras cannot capture. This act of writing, of course, parallels the novel’s rhetorical gesture as well. As if to illustrate the extent to which the industry has taken over, however, Minnie fills the pages with trivial entries having to do with her infatuation with actor Gilbert Carlton, a man who only uses Minnie to further himself in the industry.

The closing scene of *Minnie Flynn* offers a significant point of contrast to *The Extra Girl*. Upon returning from the war, Deane proposes to Minnie in a Chinese restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard. “[W]e’ll clear out of Hollywood,” he tells her. “Hollywood is a little, narrow house, Minnie, and some of us have made of it a cell” (379). Minnie contemplates his offer, imagining how wonderful “travel[ing] away, far way” with Deane could be (380). Ultimately, though, she declines his proposal. She tells him, “I will never marry you, Hal. I couldn’t do it and keep faith with my love [for you], which is the only holy thing left [in] me” (383). Minnie denies Deane precisely because the movies have shaped and tainted the conception of marriage—the same institution she advocated while speaking to her mother at the beginning of the novel. Marriage to Deane would become yet another facet of her life under the industry’s ownership. Despite his promises that they will escape, Minnie knows she can never truly abandon Hollywood

because, like Eleanor, she has become discarded property, without value yet still under the industry's ownership like a dusty prop.

By the end of the novel, Minnie, who blames “the rotten sun in California” for her wrinkling face (312), has taken the place of Eleanor as young Alicia Adams, the new “*talk of the whole country*” (372; emphasis added), steals her spotlight and, in so doing, silences Minnie's trajectory of fame. The cycle of getting rid of the old for the new, *Minnie Flynn* implies, will continue indefinitely. She tells Tim Gow, the restaurant employee, that she will “be in tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day” (384). Unlike Sue in *The Extra Girl*, who leaves Hollywood in order to live out the rest of her life, Minnie will remain in Hollywood for the rest of hers. The “glitter of the ‘movies’” that once provided escape from her “drab and colorless” reality has led her to a life far more disappointing, far more colorless, than before (155).

The Skyrocket's protagonist Sharon Kimm, a Clara Bow-like redhead similar to Minnie, leaves her “drab gray” life of family trauma to work in Hollywood, a place “not all as simple as it is made to look in the yellow journals” (30-31). Earning an average of five dollars a day, she can barely afford to share an apartment with Lucia Morgan, an aspiring scenarist whose literary insights as a writer allow her to see beyond the “things that followed Sharon” (10). “Most of the girls in this town that—pay the price, sure do get cheated,” she tells Sharon. “The extra girls change every two years” (47).

When Sharon seeks employment at “a small casting agency” on Hollywood Boulevard, the casting agent tells Sharon that “[t]he market's overcrowded” with people

trying to break into the industry. He advises her to wait with the rest of the extras looking for work, an area she describes as:

[t]he exchange. The place where directors send when they wanted hundreds of people for a mob scene. Where the type extras—men with beards, or negroes, or fat washerwoman—registered and were on call. The bottom of the ladder. The exchange where you hadn't even a name but were herded together like cattle and sent in lots with a number to the studios like so many cans of tomatoes. It seemed to [Sharon] she had already spent a lifetime in that place, sitting on the wooden benches with men and women of every race, color, and odor in the world. (46)

The industry that hinges on familiar faces to sell its products has reduced these people to faceless, mass-produced commodities. If all extras work toward the goal of fame, as the popular misconception went, the description of them here illustrates the way they have wound up further from fame than when they began, highlighted by the detail that they lose even their names in the process of working for the movies. Unlike the sensational newspaper coverage of extras from ten years earlier that promoted individual success stories, St. Johns conveys a sense of hopelessness among the male and female extras who have come from everywhere only to sit and wait for a break that will never come.

Perhaps more directly than Marion's text, *The Skyrocket* uses cinema's literal silence as a vehicle to examine the more figurative forms of silence for young women in the film industry. Sharon, struggling for work, attends a party where she meets actor Mickey Reid, a Hal Deane-like figure who takes a romantic interest in Sharon. At the

same party, Sharon also catches the attention of Irving Kohl, a studio head who offers her a contract to act in his movies alongside his famous wife, actress Nadine Allis. Prior to meeting Nadine at the party, Sharon feels that Kohl's wife "had all the things Sharon wanted and was all the things Sharon hoped to be" (49) despite the fact that her "read[ing] of the fame and fortune of picture stars" (43) has entirely informed her knowledge of Nadine. As soon as Nadine enters the novel, the narrator describes the sound of her voice as reflective of her depth, which entirely eludes fans such as Sharon who, although "do not know the great star" personally, still emote a "deep, loving envy" for her (49):

The screen has missed something in Nadine Allis's voice. A light voice, but full of shadowy pools of melody. A voice suggestive of happy and delightful secrets. A voice that had an undercurrent of laughter, and yet was often sad. People were always repeating things that Nadine Allis had said. And when they were repeated they sounded flat and uninspired, because they were actually neither witty nor profound. It was only the cadence of them that had made them remembered. (50)

In contrast to the generic "golden curls" that cover her face (53), Nadine's voice is at once the part of her that embodies her essence and, perhaps tragically, the part of her that film cannot reproduce technologically. When Sharon watches Nadine on a movie set later on, she wonders how the male director fails to "realize that Nadine's emotions lay deep—terribly deep—beneath that matter-of-fact sweetness" (122). Fans, Sharon laments, will

never know the “real” Nadine as long as they lack access to her voice in film. Without her voice, to borrow Mulvey’s terminology, Nadine remains a two-dimensional image.

The Skyrocket attributes Nadine’s sense of silence to her marriage to Kohl. On the one hand, Kohl has brought success to Nadine singlehandedly, but, on the other, that success has come with Nadine’s eternal debt to Kohl, restricting her from “real happiness” (251). She tells her mother, “I know what I owe the man who made me. At least, I married him. . . . I’ll carry on. I couldn’t bring down a scandal on the people who have loved me. It all has its price, always, doesn’t it, mama?” (252). Her fame, restricting rather than liberating her femininity, remains the property of an influential man in the industry. The pressure of maintaining a happy public that Hollywood fame connotes has impeded her from having a happy private life—or a private life at all. Nadine complains, “I’m sick of washing my face and fixing my hair. I’m sick of dressing and undressing. It’s all I ever do. That’s my life” (250). Hollywood stardom, while “suppl[ying] opportunities for self-expression” for consumer culture (15), as Paula Marantz Cohen has argued, robs the source of her capacity to express or exercise her own voice. Mass culture and the movies may have prompted women out of the domestic lifestyle, but Nadine’s internal struggles continue to demonstrate the way the industry entails its own form of domesticity, entrapment, and silence.

Nadine serves as a martyr figure for the women who admire her from the distance of fan magazines, but Sharon, like Minnie, disregards her fan base entirely in favor of her own vanity. As her success continues to build, sleazy director William Dvorak recruits her to act for his studio. Similar to Kohl’s “making” of Nadine, Sharon’s relationship

with Dvorak marks the most prominent example of the powerful male who controls actresses on and off camera. Testing her emotional reflexes upon their first meeting, Dvorak shows Sharon a painting of “a famous Madonna” that he had purchased from “one of the great galleries of Europe,” only available to “a man as rich as Dvorak.” For Dvorak, the painting—like a movie—“possessed that very quality that seemed to bring a magic self-forgetfulness upon people.” As she stares at “the Mother of God” who “looked down upon her with the glorious Child held against her full breasts [,] ... Sharon Kimm unconsciously held out both arms to that Mother. Then, ashamed, she put her hands to her throat” (129-130). The image of the Virgin Mary holding a newborn Christ draws readers, and Sharon, back to the earlier passages that recount her mother’s suicide one Christmas Eve during her childhood. Dvorak’s painting reminds Sharon that she has grown up without this idyllic mother-child bond which she has evidently longed for since her mother’s death. Indeed, the painting somewhat parallels the saloon window Minnie stares into, both showing the female protagonists a version of themselves they have yet to fulfill. And like the saloon window in *Minnie Flynn*, acting for the silent screen deceptively fills Sharon’s internal void.

Despite Sharon’s deeply personal connections with the painting, Dvorak—an “avowed atheis[t]”—uses it “over and over to lay bare the hearts of people who stood before him,” as if to standardize emotion itself by using what he calls “the greatest story of all ages.” Making clear he cares not for the painting’s religious significance but for the ways he can manipulate it to his benefit, Dvorak unexpectedly asks Sharon, “Are you a virgin?” Then, suggesting his preference for her answer in the negative, he explains, “I

prefer to work with women, not with children” (130). In one sentence, Dvorak at once reduces the cultural value of the painting as well as Sharon’s body to a sex object. Indeed, the relationship between Sharon and Dvorak loosely resembles that of Trilby and Svengali from George Du Maurier’s classic nineteenth-century novel about a male musical mentor who hypnotizes his tone-deaf female protégé into a talented singer. Svengali famously tells Trilby, “[Y]ou shall see nothing, hear nothing, think of nothing but Svengali, Svengali, Svengali!” (52; emphasis in original).²² When he offers her a movie contract, Dvorak similarly asks Sharon, “Will you let me dictate every move of your life? ... I don’t care anything about you personally. ... I don’t care anything about your private morals, so long as they are private and not a public disgrace. But you’d have to put yourself entirely in my hands, if I’m to waste time teaching you anything” (131). If Svengali controls Trilby’s voice at the expense of her muted consciousness, Dvorak uses the promise of film stardom to ventriloquize Sharon’s desire on a more pervasive level. As with Minnie’s fascination with the all-powerful camera, Dvorak’s instructions do not discourage Sharon. Instead, as if to suggest her figurative silence, “[h]er throat [feels] dry with excitement,” and as if to foreshadow the shift of her self-perception based on the image Dvorak creates of her, “[h]er eyes were beginning to ache and twitch with strain” (131).

Dvorak’s cinematic representation of Sharon increasingly permeates her own self-image. When she watches herself on screen for the first time in a projection room, she sees “a new-born goddess. ... And ever afterwards it was that picture which came before

²² To stress the *Trilby* link across the novels, Marion once proclaimed that “she couldn’t act ‘even if Svengali hypnotized me’” (Beauchamp 30).

her mind's eye when she thought of herself" (139). As a "new-born," film acting has emotionally brought her back into a nurturing mother's arms, but such fulfillment of course comes entirely from Dvorak's decisions and direction. In fact, following this scene, her onscreen image begins to negate her past identity entirely, as it does Minnie's. St. Johns writes, "She was in a formative stage, off screen, where her personality was strangely missing. The old Sharon was gone ... [I]n her work, the new individuality was being molded. But off the screen, she had as yet evolved no positive personality to take place of the old" (149). That Dvorak has to rebuild her picture personality from the ground up ridicules the industry's star system that promoted charisma as a causal link to stardom rather than its effect. Once Sharon's "new individuality" blossoms, it is used more for the purposes of manipulating Sharon than her fans.

Sharon's self-obsession and disregard for her fan base manifests during a movie premiere in New York. Sharon and Lucia watch from a limousine as the fans "held [Sharon] breathless—straining, staring, naked faces, filled with desire—some desire that the sight of such splendid butterflies as Sharon Kimm seemed to satisfy" (202). But the fandom that studios once encouraged as a form of promotion turns ugly here: "The long line swayed forward crushingly.... Then it was driven back by shouting policemen. The people fought, tore, clawed at each other for a sight of this woman whom they had seen only in the grays of the silver sheet" (202). The crowd resembles a more excited version of the disillusioned movie extras in the exchange room, equally faceless and equally contained in an authorized space. Being the star of the film, Sharon needs the assistance of "four policemen to get her into the theater" (202), just as the four walls of a studio

block out the public. As Marion does in *Minnie Flynn*, St. Johns portrays the silencing effects of success, but she also demonstrates the violent disconnect that Hollywood has created on a cultural level. The interaction between fans and stars that drew so much attention to the studios in the 1910s no longer exists in this world, evidenced by the fact that fans had never seen Sharon in the flesh prior to this premiere. While early Hollywood welcomed fans for the sake of selling itself, the same fans in this scene are at war with one another as they each seek the same product: Sharon. None of them will ever acquire her, of course, because she has turned into one of the industry's promotional fictions.

III.

Far from being movie plots pushed into prose, *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket*, as I have argued, adapted the sugarcoated extra-girl narratives emerging in the 1920s which had themselves operated as the studios' adaptations to subdue the widespread optimism of early Hollywood. If these novels amplified a voice of feminine oppression that other popular media outlets worked to mute, I want to conclude this chapter by exploring how the same popular media continued the line of adaptation by impeding the novels' ability to speak freely. Perhaps presaging the genre's total absorption into the studio system in spite of its attempt to denounce such capitalist entities, the *Los Angeles Times* serialized *Minnie Flynn* in its entirety a year after its publication as a book.²³ A week before the first installment, Marion told a *Times* reporter that she hoped every

²³ Harry Chandler, "the biggest [Los Angeles] booster of them all" (Starr, *Material Dreams* 102) edited and published the *Times* during *Minnie Flynn*'s serialization.

“young aspirant” would read *Minnie Flynn* before embarking on “the complex pursuits which made up the daily occupational role of the movie world.” Rather than seeking financial gain from the novel, Marion reportedly felt that “if only a little bit of good can come out of it, I’ll be repaid for the labor of writing it” (“The Real Truth”). But the newspaper, in its pursuit of sensationalism and sales, adapted the novel as a kind of gossip column, stripping it of its literary value and negating Marion’s warning to young women. At the end of the first installment, for instance, the voice of a *Times* writer immediately follows: “Read tomorrow’s installment of this fascinating life story of the movies. And, if you haven’t already guessed the characters herein, try it. It’s easy” (“Introducing Features”).

Similar to *Minnie Flynn*’s fate, the publicity circulating around *The Skyrocket* began to speak over the novel itself. In spite of *The Skyrocket*’s damning depictions of the industry, the *Times* held a contest after its release: “The publishers announce a trip to Hollywood, with a week’s stay at the Ambassador, as a reward for the best amateur review of this book. Adding the price of meals and incidental expenses to the car fare, the 11-cent trip takes on a significance even for residents of Los Angeles. Buy a book and get full particulars!” (Ford). The contest situates *The Skyrocket* in a similar position to that of Goldwyn’s “New Faces” promotion in *Photoplay* a few years earlier. Understood in this way, the process of adapting the extra-girl narrative was a dynamic one, constantly shifting as novelists and studios modified and re-modified it to fulfill their respective agendas. This back-and-forth eventually recontextualized the novels to the point of

cultural erasure; although the novels had plenty of publicity surrounding their respective releases, *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* never went past a first edition.²⁴

A year after *The Skyrocket*'s publication, the lesser-known studio Celebrity Pictures adapted St. Johns's novel into a now-lost silent film starring Peggy Hopkins Joyce. Inherently antithetical to the content of *The Skyrocket*, the film served as a promotional vehicle for the up-and-coming Joyce, an actress who "blasted into public prominence entirely by way of the screaming headline" (Rosenblum 5). Perhaps reflecting the empty gesture of adapting such a verbose novel into a speechless medium, one film reviewer quipped that "St. John's [sic] story was a frothy recital of the inner doings of Hollywood, but whoever made the adaptation . . . turned out an unsustained plot that lacks conviction" (qtd. in *Film Daily*). A Chicago newspaper likewise opined that the film version of *The Skyrocket* "is interesting and pretty well done—though by no means as colorful and gripping as the original story" (Tinee 17). A *Photoplay* article agreed, noting that director Marshall Nielan "missed some of the bigger and deeper moments of the stirring novel" ("Shadow Stage" 47).

These reviews are hardly surprising considering that among Hays's earlier tasks in 1924 was to prevent adaptations of novels that might have "a deleterious effect on the industry in general" (qtd. in Maltby 560). Serious film adaptations of *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket*, in their depiction of the predatory men in charge, would certainly have been at odds with the MPPDA's aim to rectify Hollywood's image during these fragile years. Once sound came into the picture, however, literary works that had previously

²⁴ Kessinger Publishing reprinted *The Skyrocket* in 2004, but its availability continues to be sparse.

undermined the industry suddenly turned into an untapped resource of revenue for the studios. A *Times* article from 1932 observes that studios understood the appeal of adapting stories “pok[ing] fun” at Hollywood, so long as they came “from within the confines of its own colony ... [I]f a picture will make money [,] they now say ‘shoot the works.’”²⁵ J.P. McEvoy’s novel *Hollywood Girl* (1929), for instance, turned into a script for the talkies almost immediately after its publication, finding its way to the screen as *Showgirl in Hollywood* (1930)—a film that showcased film’s technological capability by including musical numbers. Despite the marketability of the films, the article goes on to remind readers, the Hays Office continued to make these films morally admissible, thereby fortifying the industry’s promotional apparatus: “[T]he movies have Will Hays as a buffer. He takes the complaints and ribs and smooths them out” (Scott B13).

1932 also saw the release of Columbia’s *Hollywood Speaks*, Universal’s *Once in a Lifetime*, and RKO’s *What Price Hollywood?*, which credits St. Johns for “the story.” To draw attention away from their Hays-stamp, the films capitalize on the presence of synchronized sound as a mark of their authentic depiction of Hollywood life. The title *Hollywood Speaks*, for instance, invokes something of a newspaper headline and suggests that the inclusion of sound exposes that which had been previously concealed to the public. *What Price Hollywood?* originally bore the subtitle “The Truth About Hollywood” (Fowler 2). Still, the film versions do away with the novels’ central formula of vilifying the industry’s powerful men. *What Price Hollywood?* points the proverbial

²⁵ Of course, the studio heads proclaimed a different line of reasoning for these productions. *Once in a Lifetime* begins with a scroll of Carl Laemmle’s words, explaining to the film’s audience that, despite risking the “world laugh[ing] at us[,] ... I decided if I could make the world laugh in times like these, it would be a great thing to do.”

finger not at the industry but at the washed-up alcoholic director, Max Carney, as well as the insensitive public who spoil Mary Evans's career. Studio head Julius Saxe, on the other hand, rather than treating Mary as just another employee, turns into more of a nurturing father figure.

The opening sequences of *What Price Hollywood?* succinctly show how the talkies continued to speak over the novels. After celebratory illustrations of Hollywood appear in the introductory credits accompanied by an upbeat musical score, the camera cuts to adopt the perspective of Mary, played by Constance Bennett, who flips through a fan magazine made up of similar images. Although the magazine takes up most of the shot, viewers also begin to see the interior of Mary's apartment in the background. The illustrations in the opening credits coupled with the focus of the fan magazine solidifies the film's awareness of Hollywood's promotional discourse, but the shots of Mary's meager apartment immediately thereafter—complete with a wall bed—foregrounds a world outside of the industry's commercial representation. As she flips through the fan magazine, she stops at an advertisement of a generic platinum-blond star modeling name-brand stockings, and the camera dissolves to a shot of Mary's legs as she puts on a pair of stockings. This pattern continues; each time Mary comes across a fashion advertisement in the magazine, she stops to emulate the image. She suddenly stops at a photo of Clark Gable, who stares off into the distance as a woman passionately kisses him, to which Mary mumbles sensually, "Hmm, oh boy." She folds the page in half to show only Gable, holds the magazine to her face to come cheek-to-cheek with his photo, and begins speaking in an exaggerated aristocratic voice: "Darling, how I *love* you, my

darling. I love you, I do.” She suddenly snaps out of her fantasy when she notices the clock. “Getting late. Time to scram,” she says in a voice audibly distinct from her previous line. The difference between her aristocratic and her “real” voice snaps the viewer, like Mary herself, out of the movie daydream. The most striking part of the scene, however, is when Mary shuts off the music coming from her turntable that the viewer assumes had been coming from outside the world of the film.²⁶ Similar to Mary’s fabricated voices calling attention to the artifice of film acting, the abrupt halt of the music negates the invisibility central to classic Hollywood cinema by calling attention to film technology itself.²⁷ It is hardly a stretch to assume, then, that these films—which offered a more tantalizing and immersive behind-the-scenes experience—competed with the novels written during the silent era that, as I have shown, put so much emphasis on giving readers what the screen lacked.

Some writers continued to release renditions of the extra-girl narrative well into the age of the talkies with such novels as *Reckless Hollywood* (1932), but as Nathanael West’s *The Day of the Locust* helps show, the genre had turned into somewhat of an empty literary gesture a decade following Marion and St. Johns’s novels. Faye Greener, an extra girl who frequents Central Casting and who is well-versed in the industry’s frequent output of “Cinderella theme[d]” “backstage stor[ies]” (107), yet again adapts the extra-girl narrative as her weapon against unsuspecting men. Faye, unlike Minnie or

²⁶ The script for the film emphasizes this play on sound: “During the progress of foregoing lap dissolves there is a phonograph playing the same tune as has been heard at the beginning of screen credit dissolves” (Fowler 5).

²⁷ In *The Classic Hollywood Cinema*, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson explain that “Hollywood film strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and ‘invisible’ storytelling” (3).

Sharon, has “no need for tenderness,” and her flirtations with men remain “closer to murder than to love” (68). Adopting the demeanor of the young naïve female to strengthen her chances in the business, Faye’s character vivifies the expired status of the extra-girl novel, caricaturing a genre that had previously sought to disrupt Hollywood’s version of women working in the industry.

An Indoor Industry: Soundstages, the Detective Novel, and Hollywood Boulevard

The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. The familiar experience of the moviegoer, who perceives the street outside as a continuation of the film he has just left, because the film seeks strictly to reproduce the world of everyday perception, has become the guideline of production. ... [L]ife is to be made indistinguishable from the sound film.

—Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 1944

I.

In his 1946 study on Southern California, historian Carey McWilliams nostalgically described Hollywood's social atmosphere during the silent era, a time when film stars "could be seen throughout the city, on the streets and on location" (283). A place that once encouraged unity amongst "the industry and the community," Hollywood according to McWilliams underwent a drastic shift following the inclusion of synchronized sound in motion pictures: "Tourists and visitors were not welcome in the new double-walled, soundproof studios. Location trips were reduced to a minimum and the movies became an indoor industry" (333). As I discuss in Chapter 1, the consolidation of the studio system—sound or no sound—had already led to the privatization of film production while keeping fans loyal to ticket purchases, but McWilliams's observations invite a way to begin thinking about sound's impact on the physical landscape and culture of Hollywood. While tourists and extras may have been disruptive during the early twenties, sound made their presence even more of a financial risk. No longer could visitors watch film production from bleachers as they did at Universal Studios in 1915 or

drive by sprawling movie sets built on the city's public streets. Instead, McWilliams notes, soundstages solidified the public and private spheres. Tour books around this time list the addresses of film studios but repeatedly include the blunt reminder: "No visitors" (*Los Angeles* 237).

Several *Los Angeles Times* articles described the architectural alteration dramatically, informing readers that "[t]he soundproof walls will be built from concrete anchored deep in the earth" ("Sound Stages"). "[T]o be soundproof," another piece explained, "the new stages must be cut off completely from the outside atmosphere" (Henry). The steel and concrete structures replaced what one journalist wistfully described as the "dressing rooms of stars of bygone days" as well as "the property room with its accumulation of years" (qtd. in Shiel 159). With them went the structures that enthrall Sharon Kimm in *The Skyrocket*, including "the huge dressing-room buildings" and "canvas-walled and glass-roofed" (St. Johns 104). Nevertheless, the heightened sense of exclusivity and technological mystery surrounding soundstages made access to them all the more desirable. "Strange as it may seem," a *Times* writer quipped in 1932, "set visiting is the most absorbing pastime to those who are fortunate enough to get within the confines of a studio" (Merrick).

In addition to updating stages, which ultimately caused the studios to "turn[] their backs on the outside world" (Shiel 161), sound changed the industry's approach to the so-called extra girl—a figure who offered a point of identification for a female readership during the silent era. As Anthony Slide explains, studios in the business of talkies, more than searching for faces that would film well, now sought actors who also had singing

and dancing capabilities conducive to sound film. To acquire such talent, studios began looking to “the legitimate stage” instead of the pool of extras who roamed the streets of Hollywood or phoned Central Casting every fifteen minutes (Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 16). Historian Murray Ross has similarly argued that sound drew the line between actor and extra, effectively doing away with the days “when a number of prominent screen stars rose from the ranks of extras” (86). Understood in this way, sound complicated, if not altogether silenced, the myth of upward mobility that largely informed the optimism and sustaining the hopes of many extras in the 1910s. According to one fan magazine writer, “[t]he wise ones [were] not waiting for the talking fad to be over. They ha[d] left the business completely” (Albert 31).²⁸ With the once identifiable figure of “extra girl” now nostalgically associated with the silent era, earlier novels critiquing Hollywood through the lens of the female extra inevitably bore a timestamp as well.

The coming of sound also led to what Donna Casella has described as a mass disappearance of “[n]early all the women who [previously] wrote in Hollywood” (234). Thinking of ways to take full advantage of speech in the movies, studios invited novelists, journalists, and playwrights to Hollywood in hopes that they could come up with natural-sounding dialogue for the screen. Some female scenarists from the silent era survived the shift to the talkies, and some even came because of the shift, but by and large men began to dominate the writing rooms. It is widely known that studios in the latter half of the 1930s drew a plethora of renowned novelists from the East Coast including Aldous Huxley, F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Dos Passos, Theodore Dreiser,

²⁸ See Anthony Slide’s *Hollywood Unknowns* for a more detailed discussion of this 1929 *Photoplay* article (30).

Christopher Isherwood, and, later in 1940, William Faulkner—each of whom accepted the invitation for what they considered easy money; but “on a lower echelon,” as David Wilt describes, many other writers came to Hollywood because they “proved they could write . . . and would work cheap” (4). Like an extra’s lack of sustained labor during the silent era, these writing positions were “notoriously uneven, short-termed, and unpredictable” (Rosten 323). When writers did have an assignment, as Richard Fine has demonstrated, many were shocked by the industry’s general expectation that they “create with mechanical regularity and speed” (117). With their material constantly subjected to revisions by those higher on the chain of command, writers “worked in anonymity” (133) and lacked the autonomy necessary for their sense of “individuality and creativity” (104). As a result, they generally viewed themselves as “occupy[ing] the bottom rung of the Hollywood status ladder” (R. Fine 106), having more in common with the extra girl of the 1920s than with the stars and directors.

Implicit in penning more “believable” dialogue were the kinds of films that required it. The talkies opened up the possibilities for new cinematic genres, most famously the gangster picture—a prime example of a genre complemented by sound because of its “promise to street realism” and “heavy reliance on urban slang to accomplish it” (Rubin 84). Aside from gangster films, the talkies also led to what Philippa Gates describes as “proliferation of classical sleuths” on screen (60). The “long, convoluted” stories relying more on “dialogue than on action” made silent film a less-than-ideal venue for plots where the detectives “usually interview[] witnesses, discuss[] the case with his companion” and “reveal[] to the group of suspects ‘whodunnit’” (Gates

60). To be sure, detective stories did find their way onto the screen in the silent days with such films as Biograph's *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (1916) and Samuel Goldwyn's *Sherlock Holmes* (1922). Buster Keaton's comedy *Sherlock Jr.* (1924) even links the detective to a kind of cinematic self-reflexivity by telling the story of a theater projectionist dreaming his way into a mystery movie. But as William Luhr asserts, "it was not until the sound era that the genre took off" (280).

Since many social concerns prominent in early 1920s Hollywood fiction looked drastically different by the end of the decade, these wholesale shifts in landscape, extra work, screenwriting, and dialogue-friendly film genres help to explain why the literary representation of Hollywood underwent its own remodeling during the advent of sound. According to Nancy Brooker-Bowers's extensive bibliography on the Hollywood novel, Arnold Fredericks's *The Film of Fear* (1917) and Arthur Reeve's *The Film Mystery* (1921) are the only detective novels published prior to the talkies dealing directly with the film industry. Clearly a less common mode of Hollywood fiction at the time, the former centers on a crazed movie fan whose letter to actress Ruth Morton threatens to destroy her career "within thirty days" by making her beautiful face "hideous!" while the latter begins with a murder of actress Stella Lamara on a film shoot. The mysteries require the respective expertise of Craig Kennedy, a Sherlock Holmes-type figure who is "the founder of the scientific school of modern detectives," and retired detective Robert Duvall, a husband and father who "never go[es] to motion pictures" but turns into a self-proclaimed "motion-picture 'fan'" by the novel's end.

As if to transplant the early to mid-1920s narratives documenting the plight of the extra girl, the male detective figure emerged much more frequently during the rise of the talkies in Hollywood fiction such as A.C. and Carmen Edington's *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1928-29) and *House of Vanishing Goblets* (1930); Earl Biggers's *The Black Camel* (1929), which featured famous detective Charlie Chan before his filmic adaptation; Raoul Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* (1930); Ben Ames Williams's *An End to Mirth* (1930); Edward Stilgebauer's *Star of Hollywood* (1930); Herbert Crooker's *The Hollywood Murder Mystery* (1930); Mark Lee Luther and Lillian C. Ford's *The Saranoff Murder* and *Card 13* (both 1930); Madelon St. Dennis's *The Death Kiss* (1932); and Octavus Roy Cohen's *Star of Earth* (1932). With the exception of Edward Stilgebauer, who lived in Germany, and Madelon St. Dennis, whose biographical information remains a mystery in itself, each of the writers listed here had firsthand experience in Hollywood and eventually wrote for the talkies. Such autobiographical information bolstered the credibility (i.e. marketability) of their fiction, similar to the way *Picture Play* magazine advertised *Minnie Flynn* and *The Syrocket* as countering the "falsity" of "literary tricksters" who wrote novels set in Hollywood without ever having set foot there ("Observer"). Still, like *The Film of Fear* and *The Film Mystery*, some of these works ultimately cast the film industry in a more promotional light. Crooker's novel, for instance, ends with the lead detective living happily ever after with a famous movie actress.

Instead of depicting the film industry optimistically, where crime and corruption are aberrations, the detective novels I give most focus to in this chapter, A.C.

and Carmen Edington's *The Studio Murder Mystery* (serialized in *Photoplay* magazine) and Raoul Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* (serialized in *Black Mask* magazine), respond more specifically to the social and material effects of the talkies and, in the process, view the film industry through a much more hard-boiled lens. If novelists of the early 1920s used the identifiable figure of the extra girl to counter the industry's promotional apparatus during silent Hollywood, novels of the second half of the 1920s and early 1930s employed the hard-boiled detective figure—which Mike Davis calls the “conduit for the resentments of writers in the velvet trap of the studio system” (38)—as the updated literary vehicle to elicit critical awareness of Hollywood as a culture industry. Paralleling the large pool of male writers invited to Hollywood with the coming of sound, the detectives in these novels begin as outsiders with privileged access to movie studios because of their professional status, granting them mobility not only physically but socially as well. As Frank Krutnik observes, “the private eye—the most archetypal ‘hard-boiled’ hero—operates as a mediator between the criminal underworld and the world of respectable society. He can move freely between these two worlds, without really being part of either” (39). I would also add that rather than clearly distinguishing an “underworld” from a “respectable society,” the hard-boiled detectives in these novels expose the extent to which the film industry's moral and promotional façade began spilling over the studio gates and inundating the public spaces of Hollywood, where as Paul Skenazy asserts, “to act a part is to be a person” (116). Such a hard-boiled figure already made popular in pulp magazines provides an appropriate counterpart for the male screenwriter, one not necessarily subjected to the film camera's patriarchal surveillance

that entraps Minnie Flynn or Sharon Kimm but one who nevertheless struggles with the lack of creative autonomy in his work. During an age of “industrial and corporate triumphalism” that threatened “the promise of individual achievement,” the hard-boiled detective “count[s] on only one thing: himself” (Rzepka 182, 186). Finally, the fact that the studios adapted both the Edingtons’ and Whitfield’s novels—respectively Paramount’s *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1929) and MGM’s *Moonlight Murder* (1936)—makes my decision to focus on them all the more appropriate. I will therefore conclude this chapter with a brief examination of these novels alongside their adaptations to illuminate how the studio system at once absorbed and deflated their potentially subversive material.

It is significant that the novels at hand, like most detective novels, rhetorically situate their reader as a detective—an outsider with the ability to penetrate studio gates and navigate the larger moral façade of the Hollywood landscape. Similar to the task of a detective, readers spend the novels attempting to solve the mystery through the evidence presented to them, originally one magazine installment at a time. In addition to offering a cash prize of \$3,000 to readers who solved the crime, the installments of *The Studio Murder Mystery* also included complementary maps of studio backlots with a caption reading: “Save this diagram. It may help you solve the crime” (“Studio” 31). More importantly, however, the detectives’ hard-boiled traits tapped into a larger cultural rejection of traditional models of masculinity. Given that the figure of the extra girl in the 1910s was a result of the New Woman movement that had sought to break from a Victorian model of femininity, the hard-boiled figure of 1920s fiction, as Christopher

Breu argues, similarly embodied a form of masculinity defined “both against Victorian morality” and “the emergence of corporate capitalism” (36). For Breu, the inception of hard-boiled masculinity reflected a “modernist and class-inflected rejection of the Victorian conception of middle-class white manliness,” which included “a conception of manhood as an internal moral quality” (2). The implications of situating readers as hard-boiled detectives, notably characterized by an “amoral detachment” (Breu 66), reflect a broader attempt on the part of the authors to challenge the morals clause implemented into actors’ contracts following the Arbuckle scandal to help secure the industry’s profit. While movie star Douglas Fairbanks, for instance, offered a new mode of masculinity by redefining notions of leisure, as Lary May observes, Fairbanks still depended on “a woman free of too much sensuality” to assert his dominance (118). Notably detached from the “moral discourses of progress and civilization” that served to rationalize corporate capitalism (Breu 136), the hard-boiled detective in these novels achieves mobility in part by operating beyond the immediate restrictions of Hollywood’s patriarchal studio system.

In his study on detective fiction, Charles Rzepka draws on the seminal work of Louis Althusser and Antonio Gramsci to argue that the detective figure ultimately serves as “the defender of hegemonic norms and self-perpetuating value systems” (22), making detective fiction a genre that “interpellate[s] its readers into conformity with the hegemony of white, male, middle-class values” (21). For Rzepka, Dashiell Hammett’s fiction is “a throw-back to Enlightenment positivism” (191), while Chandler’s protagonist Marlowe ultimately “resembles the detective hero of the Golden Age novelist

[Chandler] most despised” (202). But his claims fail to consider how the hard-boiled detective in Hollywood operates on the fringes of—and sometimes against—the capitalist studio system. Unlike the classic detective who “turn[ed] criminology into an exact science” (Mandel 20), the hard-boiled detective sees crime as a regular condition of the social world and does away with inductive methods and modern science largely because science itself has fallen into the hands of studios bent on profit.²⁹ As James Lastra details in his history of cinematic sound, soundmen working for the talkies, whose rigid investment in science inflected their “objective and universal” recording standards (168), eventually developed “a new logic of representation” based on “their new corporate responsibilities” (174).

Of course, hard-boiled fiction set outside of Hollywood had been written well before the talkies. The iconic staccato writing style made up of “affectless parataxis” (Breu 40) began appearing in pulp magazines as early as 1920, most famously *Black Mask*. Distinctly American in its tone, as Sean McCann declares, hard-boiled fiction generically depicted an “image of the metropolis as a battlefield of crime lords and corrupt officials” (McCann 44).³⁰ The urban setting in such fiction turns into a façade of spectacular consumerism that obscures the corporate corruption operating beneath. Take,

²⁹ Thomas Edison, who famously opposed the idea of his film camera being used for entertainment purposes, eventually capitulated to the industry by allowing studios to use his invention. According to Thomas Schatz, Edison even helped Carl Laemmle wire Universal’s grand opening in 1915 (17).

³⁰ In terms of style, some have attributed the hard-boiled tradition to Ernest Hemingway’s staccato writing voice. Linking Hemingway war-ridden backdrop to the 1930s urban setting, for instance, Sheldon Grebstein writes, “Hemingway’s scenario of a world at war, or of a landscape ruined and its inhabitants crippled by war, is replaced in the tough novel by scenario of a society beset and corrupted by crime” (21). But as critics such as Paul Skenazy and David Fine point out, writers published hard-boiled stories from *Black Mask* a few years before the release of Hemingway’s first short stories.

for instance, Dashiell Hammett's famous novel *The Maltese Falcon* (1929), set in an urban San Francisco inundated with billboards of "moving picture[s] and gasoline" among the "two-store buildings" (13). In terms of character, as Paul Skenazy and David Fine observe, the hard-boiled protagonist provided an update to the Western hero made popular in previous decades: a lone, rugged figure who "obeys a personal code" and lacks faith in civic authority (D. Fine 86). This linking of the hard-boiled detective to the cowboy figure helps to explain why California—the "closure of the frontier" (Breu 59)—provides an ideal landscape for such archetypes. Edmund Wilson noted that "[a]ll visitors from the East know the strange spell of unreality which seems to make human experience on the [West] Coast as hollow as the life of a troll-nest" (57), while Nicholas Warner has claimed that Southern California in particular offers the perfect setting for a detective who sets himself in "opposition not only to crime but to a delusive, image-obsessed mental set that dominates California life" (22). In light of its booster campaign beginning in the late nineteenth century that made Los Angeles in particular "the best-advertised city in America" through the 1930s (D. Fine 198), David Fine sees hard-boiled novels set in Los Angeles as "puncturing the bloated image of Southern California as the golden land of opportunity and fresh start" (44). Indeed, if the hard-boiled male defined himself against an "emerg[ing] mass and corporate culture" (Breu 60), what better place than the capitalist enterprise of Hollywood to place a hard-boiled detective?

Although several scholars have taken interest in the link between hard-boiled fiction and California disillusion, no piece of scholarship examines how the advent of sound and its impact on tourist Hollywood contributed to, if not altogether ignited, the

hard-boiled fiction set in Southern California. What I am pushing for in this chapter is an understanding of the archetypal Los Angeles hard-boiled detective, which prefigured Los Angeles noir, as a figure overdetermined by the advent of the talkies. As I will show, the detective in Hollywood struggles to identify where the illusion of film (often analogous to veiled corruption) ends and where a sense of reality begins. To push against Rzepka's understanding of detective fiction as reflecting Althusserian interpolation, in other words, these detectives oppose the very kind of ideological state apparatus that Althusser once described as "cramming every 'citizen' with daily doses" (28): popular media.

As I argue in Chapter 1, the extra girl genre that typified the previous generation of Hollywood fiction used the act of writing as a method to retrieve a female voice silenced by cinematic and promotional convention. To build on this literary method of countering the industry's tools—more specifically for this chapter, sound recording devices—these novels written alongside the rise of the talkies frequently highlight their detectives' silence in relation to other characters. Given the early talkies' tendency to "talk, talk, talk" and bore audiences with actors "who did little but exchange interminable lines" (qtd. in Crafton 533), the detectives' terse or lack of speech suggests a conscious dismissal of the industry's emerging technological practices. Detective Smith from *The Studio Murder Mystery* utters his first words with "a quiet" (52) and "drawling voice" (53). Compared to the longwinded speech of other characters, he regularly speaks "briefly" (54) or "dryly" (70). Detective Jim Hanvey from *Star of Earth*, "[n]ever addicted to hasty speech or prodigality with words" (20), similarly has a "soft, drawling voice" (4). The first mention of Ben Jardinn in *Death in a Bowl*, moreover, stresses his

refusal to be influenced by cinematic technology: Jardinn “nodded his head, but he did not speak. . . . His voice was soft; when he spoke he had a habit of turning his head away from the person to whom he talked” (4). If the Victorian detective figure in the late nineteenth century embodied emerging camera technologies as Ronald Thomas has argued,³¹ this passage offers a point of contrast between the Victorian detective and Jardinn’s hard-boiled traits. Jardinn here indicates that the visual—what former detectives rely on most—obscures his ability to judge the speaker’s credibility and gather evidence. While Frank Krutnik and David Fine each liken hard-boiled novels to classic Hollywood style in their “extremely economical” approach to both character and prose (Krutnik 40) and in their staccato language—“so close to the level of concrete, lived experience that they often read like screenplays” (Fine 94)—these novels suggest the opposite.

Considering the “the hard-boiled male . . . gain[s] agency as he moves knowingly through seemingly opaque urban spaces” (Breu 11), the literary genre also opposes the relatively immobile camera technologically restricted to a soundstage. As Ernst Mandel points out, the hard-boiled detective works “by obstinate questioning” that requires him to “move[] from place to place” (36). During the silent era, the popular Bell and Howell film camera produced reliably “rock-steady image[s]” (Crafton 230), but the design proved problematic for the talkies as the sensitive microphones would pick up the sound

³¹ In his discussion of nineteenth-century detectives, Thomas argues that “[t]he trained eye of the great detective alters [the] conventions of vision and exposes to us . . . what had previously been hidden from view.” Using Sherlock Holmes to anchor his discussion, Thomas asserts, “Like another remarkable Victorian visual apparatus, the camera, we might think of Holmes . . . as the literary embodiment of the elaborate network of visual technologies that revolutionized the art of seeing in the nineteenth century” (134–35).

of the camera's motor. To control the noise, cinematographers sat with their cameras in a soundproof box—referred to “iceboxes” because of their resemblance to a refrigerator—and filmed through a small glass window. Sound engineers sat in a separate icebox nearby to focus on the audio recording. Because the camera was restricted to a box, actors had to perform around the camera's limits with less mobility than the silent era. In spite of the wheels attached to the bottom of the iceboxes, for instance, the camera's “flexibility was still not as great as desired” (Green 167). Therefore, the fiction inherently shows a side to the film industry technologically incompatible for film production.³²

³² The detective figure might point to the fiction's sensationalism compared to the more historical figure of the extra girl, but the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA) headed by Will Hays did in fact hire detectives for studio-related tasks. The tightened censorship regulations that came with the rise of the talkies on screen reinforced the ever-growing need to moralize Hollywood off screen. McWilliams notes that head of MPPDA, Will Hays, hired private investigators to “scrutinize the private lives of the stars” (333). However exaggerated this claim may appear, the assistant treasurer of the MPPDA sent a letter to members in 1931 stating “some of our members are not familiar with the contract we have with the [the William Burns detective agency]” and goes on to explain that the agency had been hired as early as 1922 for “investigations, surveillance, undercover, checking ... in a skillful and *confidential* manner” (George). Far from uncommon, the detective's services, he explains, “[are] now being utilized by our members, such as Warners, First National, Vitagraph, Metro-Goldwyn, RKO, RKO Pathe, Fox, Columbia, Tiffany, Universal and Educational” (George). In this sense, Hollywood fiction continued to deal with that which fell outside of Hollywood's commercial image. It is also worth mentioning that studio moguls began taking notice of and, not surprisingly a distaste for, Hollywood fiction around this time. According to Budd Schulberg, Carroll and Garrett Graham's 1930 novel, *Queer People*, “was the sort of thing you would not dare to bring into a motion picture studio unless you hid it in a brown wrapper and locked it in your middle desk drawer.” Because of its indictment of the film industry, “it was considered something unclean and unfit for respectable studio eyes” (280).

II.

In the opening pages of Octavus Roy Cohen's 1931 novel, *The Star of Earth*, detective Jim Hanvey—"an omnivorous reader of fan magazines" (48)—observes a handful of young women in the lobby of his Hollywood Boulevard hotel

experiencing a keen sense of disappointment. Announced as the winners of various contests, they had visioned [sic] themselves received in Hollywood by all the great stars of the firmament; wined and dined at the various mansions—and eventually tendered long-term acting contracts. Instead they had been greeted at the station by a half dozen extremely bored publicity and camera-men ... Since that time they had ... attended a premiere where no one paid them the slightest attention; ... made a bewildering tour of the least consequential portions of the great Aragon studio; ... eaten Tuesday lunch at a certain restaurant on Hollywood Boulevard where many great stars and actors actually do gather—on Wednesdays; ... and attended the present farewell function ... At each of these affairs they had been squired by the identical corps of publicity men who had become cumulatively bored; and at a certain of the affairs [,] four stars ... were detailed by the studio heads to speak civilly to them. (11)

Illuminating the tension between the exciting myth and relatively dull reality of Hollywood, Cohen's passage effectively captures the moment at which Hollywood as a place became similar to experiencing a backlot tour from a decade earlier, equally susceptible to theatricality. Instead of young aspirants exploring the city of dreams by

traversing the landscape as they please, “studio heads” construct the “real” Hollywood by designating certain areas acceptable for the purposes of preventing visitors from interrupting film production. The backlot might impose strict spatial restrictions, but the female visitors in Cohen’s passage are also subjected to temporal restrictions. The stars and the visitors, while in the same geographic proximity, conveniently keep missing one another, and the visitors’ rigid itinerary offers little chance to stray from the schedule before their unfortunate departure. Hollywood Boulevard has turned into a constant movie premiere where even the street’s most mundane businesses become a source of spectacle: “[T]he throng ... congested the Boulevard in front of the plate glass windows of a delicatessen which was in the act of opening” (3). Further, Hanvey’s ability to observe the structure of this visit geared toward women “from a distance” (3) speaks to his privileged mobility that allows him to navigate the public and private spaces much more freely. It is worth noting that the experience these young women have on the streets of Hollywood parallels Hanvey’s experience on the movie lot in the following chapter. Instead of the “No Visitor” policy dictating the movement of these young women, Hanvey observes a “No Admission” sign “suspended over the narrow entrances to each of the huge sound stages” (29).

Chapter 1 provided a historical framework that examined the complex ways the Hays Office and Hollywood civic authorities conspired to discourage the overwhelming amount of fans flocking to Southern California for a glimpse at movie magic. In addition to fan magazine contests, the Chamber of Commerce sent “a huge film studio on wheels” on a cross-country tour in 1925 to bring Hollywood to the general public instead of the

other way around (“Film Studio”). But as 1923 had already made clear with its peak number of tourists, the messages of caution or blatant discouragement in newspapers and magazines had the opposite effect. Moreover, a traveling movie set in some ways missed the point since that which surrounded the film studios clearly complemented a studio’s allure. As *The Star of Earth* indicates, the privatization of film production on backlots and soundstages created a more pressing demand for *outside* promotion of the industry at large, to keep a sense of interaction, however illusory, alive in the place where movies are made. Studios and civic leaders, then, had little choice but to embrace the promotional potential of visitors more actively. As a result, the latter half of the 1920s witnessed a commodified revival of the communal spirit of early Hollywood from the 1910s.

Invoking Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra, film historian Mark Shiel asserts that by the mid-1920s the film industry largely determined the surrounding “urban landscape ... Movie props, homes of the stars and movie theaters embodied qualities similar to the studios themselves” (128), turning Hollywood Boulevard and nearby areas into something of a theme park. But unlike Baudrillard’s famous claim that Disneyland “exists in order to hide that it is the ‘real’ country, all of ‘real’ America that *is* Disneyland” (Baudrillard 12), I want to suggest that much of tourist Hollywood affirmed the opposite: that the sites of the ‘real’ Hollywood existed in part to draw attention away from the studios themselves. Unlike Disneyland, which for Baudrillard, “make[s] us believe that the rest [of Los Angeles] is real” (12), Hollywood Boulevard worked to make the inaccessible studio lots more real to those without access to them. Unable to accommodate rowdy movie fans watching from nearby bleachers inside studio walls or

on-location shoots as they did during the silent days, studios turned to communal locations such as Sid Grauman's palatial theaters and the Hollywood Bowl to offer movie fans a chance to see celebrities in spectacular settings that, as David Karnes explains, resembled "sprawling outdoor movie sets" (556). These spaces, as I will explore, also prompted the integration of radio coverage that worked to reinforce the highly mediated representations of the place of Hollywood by providing them with a soundtrack akin to a talkie. Indeed, the firsthand experience of the "real" Hollywood on the part of the outsider—that is, the tourist or non-movie person—had clearly become more filtered and manipulated for the purposes of maintaining a moral public image in the wake of scandal.

Tucked in the middle of a 1930s edition of the *Washington Post*, a small article explained that "[i]nto the contracts of virtually every star and player the studios have inserted a clause under which the player can be required to make one radio appearance for each picture in which the player is starred or featured" ("Movies Demand Stars"). A handful of scandals in the early 1920s, as I discussed briefly in Chapter 1, prompted Will Hays to impose a so-called morals clause into actors contracts which stressed "due regard to public convention and morals" and restricted actors from "commit[ing] any act which will degrade [them] in society or bring [them] into public hatred" ("Morality Clause"). Several historians have mentioned the morality clause in passing, but perhaps the clause's relative lack of historical documentation reflects its fundamental need for concealment.³³

Resonating with David Bordwell's description of classical Hollywood cinema's

³³ An unproduced screenplay titled "Morality Clause" circulated among the studios for some time, going through revisions to treat the subject lightly. In response to a tentative plot point, one note remarked, "This would jinx picture ... The Hayes [sic] office wouldn't even let it be released" (Agnes).

technique of “striv[ing] to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and ‘invisible’ storytelling” (3), a star needed to appear natural, obscuring his or her own political construction on the part of the studios.

Not incidentally, in their interrogation of talkie Hollywood, *The Studio Murder Mystery* and *Death in a Bowl* were among the first Hollywood fictions to integrate the presence of radio technology and its influence on the broader landscape. By the late 1920s, radio had become a technological avenue through which actors could exercise their morality clauses, to fortify the link between onscreen and offscreen personality upon which Richard deCordova has argued the star system hinged. Live radio broadcast spread the Hollywood excitement geographically—a more sensorial experience for a fan than, say, reading a fan magazine from across the country. Just prior to the talkies, radio occasionally offered fans a sense of intimacy in its ability to broadcast the voices of silent stars. Not to miss the opportunity of radio’s promotional benefits, Warner Brothers—notably the studio who blazed the trail for the talkies—started its KFWB station in 1925 to advertise its productions and players (Hilmes 35). Sam Warner even wrote to Hays personally asking for his help in “obtain[ing] a higher wave length” to reach more listeners nationwide (Indiana). Later that year, an article in *Radio Age* magazine headlined “Fans Get Real Insight Into Adventures of Famous Stars” recounts a broadcast where “[t]he movie fans who have seen their favorite screen stars as many times as they possibly can, had the opportunity to hear their voices” (“Favorites”). Child star Jackie Coogan, famous for his role in Chaplin’s *The Kid* (1921), reportedly told “his innermost secrets to a host of radio admirers” (“Favorites”).

But radio broadcasts of silent cinema stars did not always go as planned. In what was called “the Big Broadcast of 1928”—a time when the talkie had yet to prove its dominance over silent cinema—Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Norma Talmadge, and Gloria Swanson spoke on air from the United Artist lot in Hollywood to an anticipated audience of fifty million listeners who sat either “at home or across the nation in cinemas which had been specially wired to receive it” (Walker 2). The key objective of this stunt was to demonstrate to fans that the actors had the speech skills necessary to enter into the realm of the talkies. Due to a combination of audience boredom and technical difficulties, however, the broadcast was unsuccessful for an industry “that had been mute all its life” (Walker 4). For some fans, hearing the silent actors’ voices broke the onscreen illusion. Others questioned the authenticity of what they heard; due to Talmadge’s “notorious[s] speechless[ness] at public functions” (Walker 2-3), several later suspected Talmadge of taking advantage of the broadcast’s lack of visual by hiring a voice-double to speak for her.

Although such radio stunts preceded the rise of sound in film, I want to suggest that the regularity of synchronized sound in movies coincided with the frequency of the industry’s radio coverage. Movie premieres in particular had some radio broadcast prior to sound, but according to a 1930 copy of *Radio Digest* magazine, actors at these earlier events would, for “hours at a time,” deliver comments lacking in any substance or sense of personality (i.e. morality): “Do you know on the screen you can see me, but can’t hear my voice. And now you can hear me speak, but can’t see me. Isn’t that funny? Ha-ha-ha” (“Talkies” 34). Chaplin reportedly muttered only “good evening” as he walked quickly

past the radio announcer at Grauman's Chinese Theater premieres ("Talkies" 34). By 1929, however, radio coverage evidently became the norm rather than the exception³⁴; *Film Daily* printed an elaborate centerfold showing Sid Grauman standing in front of the Egyptian Theater and speaking into a microphone with several illustrated lines springing from it onto locations all over the globe. The caption beneath describes him as "one of the greatest showman ... telling millions they must see" whatever film was playing at his theater ("Round the World").

If radio became a co-opted technology that only reinforced the interests of the studios, it also presented an illusory sense of immediacy amongst fans and stars, reminiscent of pre-backlot Hollywood. The "real" Hollywood turned into a kind of movie set that was, like a soundstage, ultimately tailored for sound coverage. The industry's promotional representation, in other words, now included a soundtrack to add to the print of newspapers and fan magazines. As listeners tuned in to a "live" event with the "real" stars, a radio broadcast offered an ostensibly more personal touch, especially since it could theoretically not be reproduced or replayed. Yet as Cohen's passage suggests, the industry carefully stages these events for the purposes of selling Hollywood. Since the morality clauses spearheaded by Hays prompted public appearances in spectacular

³⁴ George Cukor's film *What Price Hollywood?* (1932) depicts this irony of representations of the real Hollywood as extensions of the promotional fiction of stardom. In an earlier scene of the film, as director Max Carrey pushes a timid Mary Evans to face the radio announcer at Grauman's Chinese Theater, Mary plays along with the director's claim that she is both his date and of British royalty. She speaks with the same fake British accent she does at the beginning of the film when she daydreams her affair with a Clark Gable's headshot in a fan magazine. Following this scene, the camera cuts to a shot of a newspaper, zooming in on a headline that reads: "Who was the devastating blonde with Max Carey who knocked 'em cold over the radio at the Chinese opening?"

settings, and since these magnificent settings became the stuff of radio coverage, the line between onscreen and offscreen was becoming increasingly difficult to pinpoint.

III.

Photoplay's preface to first installment of *The Studio Murder Mystery* deemed it “the first mystery story correctly to use studio technique and an absolutely realistic background as an integral part of its plot” (“Studio Murder”). To capitalize on the authors’ insider knowledge of the industry, the magazine also noted that Carmen Edington wrote for *San Francisco Bulletin* and *The Examiner* before coming to Hollywood to write for studio publicity departments, while her husband Arlo Channing Edington (A.C.) “served in the war” before “obtain[ing] a position as a [studio] reader and worked his way into minor positions in the production department” (“Studio Murder”). Together, the couple “re-wrote scripts, doctored stories, and did general editorial work” (“Studio Murder”). Little else exists by way of biographical information, but a handful of early San Francisco newspaper articles offer some insight that help to frame my reading of *The Studio Murder Mystery*. In addition to working minor positions in Hollywood, for instance, A.C. worked as an “assistant” to San Francisco film director Charles Swickard in 1924 (“Build San Francisco”). In 1922 Carmen Edington (then writing as Carmen Ballen) published an article in *San Francisco Chronicle* suggestively titled, “Brains Better Than Beauty In Film Production Of Today,” where she advises young women to “[c]heer up! ... [T]he screen has passed the place where it only requires beautiful faces” (Ballen). Perhaps reflecting her own acting experience on the stage, as

evidenced in an earlier 1914 article, she exclaims, “Like the speaking stage, [the screen] requires brains, plus personality!” She goes on to describe novelist and filmmaker Rupert Hughes as “one of America’s foremost writers who has devoted the past year to the study of motion pictures,” a study that more than likely refers to Hughes’s extra-girl novel, *Souls for Soul* (1922). Aside from her awareness of the Hollywood fiction preceding *The Studio Murder Mystery*, her clear optimism regarding the film industry and faith in the fiction penned by powerful men like Hughes belie an attitude that would change by the time she co-wrote *The Studio Murder Mystery*.

The Studio Murder Mystery, like the novels covered in Chapter 1, privileges its own printed form by drawing a parallel between the act of investigating and the act of reading a novel. When the head of Superior Pictures, Abraham Rosenthal, asks Detective Smith if he has yet discovered the identity of the murderer, Smith responds, “This isn’t a motion picture, you know, you can’t get the whole story at one sitting” (96). David Fine and Mike Davis have both declared Whitfield’s *Death in a Bowl* the first serious detective novel set in Hollywood, but Nancy Brooker-Bowers describes *The Studio Murder Mystery* as “an early example of the Hollywood detective novel subgenre which blossomed into prominence in the 1930’s and 1940’s” (40). More in line with Brooker-Bowers’s assertion, I want to suggest that *The Studio Murder Mystery*—appearing two years before *Death in a Bowl*—documents the point at which the hard-boiled style begins to find its way into the literary representation of the film industry.

Breaking from the model of “a brilliant sleuth of upper class origins” (Mandel 15), Smith identifies more with the working class. At one point, in spite of Prohibition, he

levels with a group of physical laborers by offering them alcohol in exchange for their testimony: “Johnson! I understand you’ve got something to tell me. Come on, now, and then the drinks are on me, boys!” (221). Moreover, underscoring the lack of a restored social order emblematic of hard-boiled fiction, Smith—prior to the novel’s timeline—has worked on the still-unsolved murder of actor and director William Desmond Taylor without success. He “grunt[s] expressively” when the Chief of Police reminds him of his failure: “You remember the Taylor case? ... My boy, we can’t have another murder-mystery left up in the air” (160). His inability to solve the Taylor murder threatens his professional utility. He says, “I might as well go to hoeing potatoes for a living if I don’t [solve the case], because it’ll go down in history. Mark my words!” (159-160). Historian Kevin Starr has asserted that “the Taylor case reads like fiction” and “anticipat[es] ... the subsequent fiction of Raymond Chandler and Ross MacDonald” (*Inventing* 327), but Taylor’s ghost haunts the margins of *The Studio Murder Mystery* a decade before the emergence of Chandler and MacDonald’s hard-boiled protagonists. In this way, I insist makes the forgotten novel an important stepping stone in the lineage of Los Angeles hard-boiled fiction.

It is interesting that *The Studio Murder Mystery* never uses the term “talkies” outright but clearly responds to the increasingly privatized method of film production on soundstages.³⁵ One reason for the lack of explicit mention could have to do with the fact that sound film had yet to prove its status as a permanent practice in the industry.

³⁵ Not until their follow-up novel *The House of Vanishing Goblets*, which features some of the same characters from *The Studio Murder Mystery*, do the Edingtons explicitly mention the talkies.

Appearing just after an article entitled “How Talkies Are Made,” the first installment of *The Studio Murder Mystery* begins with the murder of famous actor Dwight Hardell on a soundstage where he rehearses for a murder scene. Because of the soundproof walls, no one hears his cries when the director Franz Seibert (readers will later learn) stabs him to death. At one point, Smith steps “from sunshine and laughter of the crowd outside, into the vast roofed space in semi-darkness” of the movie stage (84). “[E]ven in the mid-morning,” the passage continues, “Smith was conscious of an atmosphere of mystery and expectation” (84). The crowd’s laughter here that ceases just as Smith steps indoors highlights the soundproof quality of these spaces, specific to the updated architecture. Further, when Rosenthal and Smith discuss possible murder suspects in Rosenthal’s office, Rosenthal thinks to himself that “the very walls had ears against which he must disguise his words” (225), as if microphones hidden from view will record his dialogue—a paranoia clearly derived from the set-up of a soundstage.³⁶

In a landscape operating on illusion and corrupt power, the methods and tools of the classic detective become increasingly unreliable. Physical evidence in Hollywood is often misleading or altogether inadequate. It is not a coincidence that Smith begins the novel by relying on these traditional detective conventions. “Nothing original in my method here,” he admits to Seibert, “However, what often commends the customary to my mind is the indubitable fact that it *customarily* brings results! I presume that is why the customary has become customary, Mr. Seibert” (55). But as the inconclusive William

³⁶ As James Lastra explains, sound recording in the early days “involve[d] placing dummies with microphones for ears in different places around the set and recording multiple tracks” (160).

Desmond Taylor case implies, such customs of the detective—and the conventions of earlier detective fiction—lose their value in a business that fundamentally relies on visual deception. After spending some time on the investigation, Smith explains to the chief of police that “[t]hings are faked so that you can’t tell the difference with a spy-glass” (161). Illustrating the break from former detective fiction, he comes to distrust alibis and conventional forms of evidence since they often prove to be “bewilderingly realistic make-believe” (174). He instead relies on his “[i]ntuition ... I know of more than one murder mystery that has been solved by following that little ‘feeling’ ... by acting upon some thought that keeps thrusting itself into a person’s brain, or speech, involuntarily” (77).³⁷

In the process of divorcing itself from classic detective convention, *The Studio Murder Mystery* continually reveals its self-awareness as a literary piece in a network of genres. Looking over stories for potential film adaptations, Rosenthal reads Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Murder in the Rue Morgue” (1841),³⁸ widely regarded as the first modern detective story. Smith later references Poe’s “The Raven” and quotes poet Bliss Carman’s “In the House of Idiedaily” to describe Superior Film’s backlot as “ramshackle and foul” (171). More specifically, the novel acknowledges in its opening pages the

³⁷ The hard-boiled method based on feeling rather than physical evidence will later resurface in Raymond Chandler’s *The Big Sleep* (1939) when Philip Marlowe says: “I’m not Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance. I don’t expect to go over ground the police have covered and pick up a broken pen point and build a case from it” (213).

³⁸ The sound made by the orangutan in Poe’s short story provides the source of much of Poe’s mystery and continues to highlight the centrality of the talkies in *The Studio Murder Mystery*. Witnesses in Poe’s story think the voice of the orangutan comes from “that *of a foreigner*” (214; emphasis in original). Dupin tells the narrator, “[T]he voices of madmen ... are never found to tally with that peculiar voice heard upon the stairs. Madmen are of some nation, and their language, however incoherent in its words, has always the coherence of syllabification” (220).

literary shift from the extra girl genre. The morning following Hardell's murder, a young "flapper" woman from Kansas tours the "exciting and enchanting" backlot with her father and, like the premise of several extra-girl novels, feels a sense of "worship of all the exotic beauty about her ... [I]t cried out, terribly for possession," a breath away from realizing her own desire for movie stardom (16-17). When they stumble upon Hardell's corpse in the soundstage, their tour guide mistakes Hardell's body for a prop dummy and encourages the young woman to touch it, laconically explaining, "He's only wax and make-up and sawdust" (18-19). After placing her hand on Hardell's "the pale face" (19), the young woman immediately realizes the dead body is real and, instantly disillusioned by the movie glamour from a minute earlier, repeatedly screams, "I want to go home!" (20). All the ingredients for another *Minnie Flynn* seem in place in this short second chapter—the movie-struck young woman, her wide-eyed envy, her worship of famous actresses, the indifferent male studio personnel. The moment she touches Hardell's dead body, however, all the generic qualities of the extra-girl novel come to an abrupt halt. While Minnie Flynn spends the entire novel realizing Hollywood's systematic disregard for aging women, this movie-struck tourist experiences Hollywood's dark side early on.

As though to perform this generic shift, the novel never mentions these tourist characters again as they are literally scrambled off the studio lot and off the page. Shortly after Smith's arrival, he finds himself in the position of an extra and tourist all in one when he and Rosenthal accidentally walk through the background of a film shoot. Rosenthal tells him, "Don't look at the cameras. They are on the left. Ve vill walk along like ve vas just sigh-seeing vid the rest. Not too fast" (77). Smith's sudden stage fright

prompts him to “quicke[n] his pace. An instant and new respect for the screen actor was born in his bosom” (77). Afterward, Rosenthal advises him to avoid “get[ting] all excited. Mebbe you don’t get on the screen after all. They vill probably not print the first shot” (78). Unable to resist the allure of appearing in a motion picture, Smith feels “surprised to find himself as disappointed as a small boy over [Rosenthal’s] news” (78). As Rosenthal continues guiding Smith around the backlot, the chapter quickly turns into a tour in itself. Given *Photoplay*’s middle-class readership whose interest in the movie world explain the detailed descriptions of a film studio, these passages continue to stress the extent to which the novel uses Smith as a point of identification. Toward the middle of the novel, Smith observes the social structure of the studio cafeteria and identifies more with the extras than with the stars: “Near the door were extras, eating belated luncheons *like his own* ... The extras to the extras, and the stars to the stars. He realised what a hard-won fight it must be to reach the brimming cup!” (120; emphasis added).

In addition to its awareness of previous detective and Hollywood fiction, the novel explicitly situates itself against the version of Hollywood propagated by the Hays Office. At the scene of the crime, Rosenthal advises the studio production manager that he “vouldn’t to let anybody on that stage until the police get here. Not anybody! Not Mr. Hays himself” (31). Soon thereafter, the novel alludes to actual celebrity scandals that prompted Hays to clean up Hollywood’s image in the first place. Rosenthal and others “thought of the tragedies in the film world that had left ruin, financial ruin, in their wake” (26). Referring to Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle’s 1921 scandal, the two characters think of the “probable murder in a San Francisco hotel, and the public end of a popular comedy

star” (26). The passage goes on to include William Desmond Taylor’s murder in 1922, describing “[a] man, well-known, and well-liked in the picture industry, who had been shot down in his home, and the consequent fall in public favour of persons involved in the crime” (26). Then moving to Mabel Normand, whose reputation suffered drastically due to her ties to Taylor’s death, the text recounts “[t]he irrevocable ‘thumbs down’ on a lovely female actor, because certain shady pages in her past had been turned to the light” (26). The chronology of scandals ends with Thomas Ince’s mysterious death in 1924 on William Randolph Hearst’s yacht: “Last but not least, the predicted end of an internationally famous figure of the screen, because of things, scandalous things, sworn to by his wife” (26).

Perhaps *The Studio Murder Mystery*’s publication in *Photoplay*, which forbade writers to cover scandal in depth, explains why the novel often sidesteps the specific terminology and names of celebrities involved in scandal. As I mention in Chapter 1, fan magazine writers and the studios had a mutually beneficial relationship, but the relationship hinged on fan magazines publishing what the studios had approved. On the one hand, the novel’s omission of the actors’ names alongside their respective scandals acknowledges Hays’s presence and authority outside the text, but on the other, the nominal mention of Hays here challenges the basic code of *Photoplay* and other fan magazines. Put differently, the novel will refrain from the specifics of a scandal but at the same time draw very specific attention to the man in charge of diverting scandal in general.

Of course, the fact that Hays himself does not know of Hardell's murder in the fictional world of the novel highlights *The Studio Murder Mystery's* aim to provide readers with an unfiltered, more critical depiction of the film industry, beyond that of an industry-mediated gossip column. The novel grants access along with Smith to examine a non-promotional event. Rosenthal reminds Smith, "You would be surprised, Mr. Smith, how crazy people are to get into a studio! They would do anything!" (79). As Rosenthal explains the studio's publicity files (something Carmen Edington knew quite well) to Smith, he says, "We always take biographies off our people. We use them in writing stories for fan magazines and newspapers, you understand? That is, off our people under contract" (225). His description stresses the idea of the studio controlling the flow of public information, especially when having to do with its stars. His final line suggests that those under studio contract—that is, those abiding by a morality clause—have a pre-approved biography that fan magazines and newspapers can consult for their writing. More than just a simple assurance of clarification for Smith, Rosenthal's "you understand?" signals something of a rhetorical wink, as though the information appearing in press outlets makes up its own kind of fiction in the name of wholesome publicity. Rosenthal's words continue to illustrate the Edingtons' awareness of the politics surrounding Hollywood press and their attempts to take advantage of generic convention by turning it on its head, in some ways letting insider information flow outside of studio gates in the form of "harmless" fiction.

One of the novel's key critiques comes from its interrogation of sound that, when added to the discourse of morality, strengthens the sense of deception for those in power.

The Studio Murder Mystery exposes the way such systematic attempts to quell scandal and abide by the clause have provided the means to carry out and, thanks to the talkies, inspire even more inhumane behavior. To avoid bad publicity following Hardell's murder, for instance, someone suggests to Rosenthal that they rid of Hardell's body by "camouflag[ing]" it and "[r]oll[ing] him in a carpet, like they did vid Cleopatra in that Roman scene last week!" (100). The movie to which the line refers, *Cleo to Cleopatra* (1928), was one of Warner Brother's first short talkies to showcase their Vitaphone sound system. The fictional sound film, the passage implies, has also provided models for non-fictional obscenity, ironically while in the pursuit of convincing the public of the industry's ethics.

While sound has indirectly plays a role in Hardell's death on the soundstage, it eventually turns into a source of obstructed perception outside the movie lot. To draw a parallel between a private movie studio and public Hollywood spectacle, Rosenthal early in the novel compares Superior Film's backlot to Grauman's Chinese Theater. Built in 1922 and 1926 respectively, Sid Grauman's Egyptian Theater and more popular Chinese Theater located on Hollywood Boulevard became publicly accessible outlets for movie magic, turning the street into what David Karnes describes as "a brilliantly orchestrated scene of show business fantasy" (554). Movie premieres on the boulevard offered fans "a real-life glimpse of screen idols ... amidst the instruments of movie make believe, ... which preserved movie culture's 'larger-than-life' aura" (Karnes 554). Fans at these premieres, Karnes reminds us, attended not for the movie itself but for the promise of seeing celebrities whose presence provided "vicarious access to a sumptuous realm of

desire which somehow eluded daily life” (555). Grauman’s movie palaces worked to adapt the communal atmosphere of Hollywood from the 1910s with such outdoor sets as D.W. Griffith’s *Babylon* from his epic flop *Intolerance* (1916), which stood for three years after the film’s completion at the intersection of Sunset and Hollywood boulevards.³⁹ Like the decaying *Intolerance* set, which historian Gregory Paul Williams notes “became a tourist attraction and a playground for neighborhood children” (93), *The Studio Murder Mystery* depicts Grauman’s theaters and other industry events as a kind of twisted playground for the corrupt Hollywood elite to deceive an unsuspecting public body. Indicating his ongoing support of and participation in such promotional stunts, Hays served as the master of ceremonies for the Grauman’s Chinese grand opening featuring Cecil B. DeMille’s *The King of Kings* in 1927.

When Smith criticizes the lifelike dummy of Hardell used for filming, Rosenthal justifies onscreen detail as a means of ensuring the audience’s immersion in any given film: “It would make the whole thing look exaggerated ... unreal. ... Perhaps you haff never seen the kind of dummy I mean. Mebbe though you haff seen the statue of Lindbergh they haff put up in the court of the Chinese Theater in Hollywood? No? Vell, if you had, you would understand. I am told many people try to talk to him” (57).

Rosenthal here alludes to an actual statue of pilot Charles Lindbergh, dedicated in 1927 at Grauman’s Chinese Theater by actress Gloria Swanson. It is significant that Rosenthal assumes Smith and readers of the novel are familiar with not only the Chinese Theater

³⁹ Today, the relatively new Hollywood & Highland shopping mall, located three hundred feet from Grauman’s Chinese Theater, duplicates the *Babylon* set and further highlights the link between the two.

but also its recent events. Rosenthal's endorsement of the Chinese Theater contrasts his later critique of the Orpheum Theater in downtown Los Angeles where he sits "bored silly" with his wife at a vaudeville performance, or what he calls the "[s]ame old stuff" (224). Given the Orpheum's location less than a mile up the street from Sid Grauman's first Los Angeles movie palace, the Million Dollar Theater, Rosenthal's remarks illustrate the sense of novelty movie palaces on Hollywood Boulevard had, serving as the point of reference, the medium, between the inside movie employee and an outsider up to speed on tourist attractions.

More importantly, Rosenthal's comparison between the lifelike statue of Lindbergh and the movie-prop dummy also speaks to the movie-set quality of Grauman's Chinese Theater and the way the movie palace and movie set have a reciprocal relationship that inspires higher levels of movie magic. Unlike the young tourist who touches a real body on the backlot, Rosenthal rations that a place like the Chinese Theater offers the same thrills, only safer. Not to be easily engulfed, however, Smith skeptically responds, "Ways to fool the public, eh?" (57). What Rosenthal considers harmless movie magic nearly allows Seibert to get away with killing Hardell. Throughout the novel, one of the conflicting pieces of testimony from the night of the murder is that the studio gateman claims to have seen Seibert *and* Hardell leaving the backlot in Seibert's car, while the coroner's tests indicate Hardell would have been dead by the time the gateman saw him leave the lot. Developing his false alibi, Seibert tells Smith, "I dropped [Hardell] a short way from his hotel on Hollywood Boulevard. ... A short distance from Highland"

(63). Seibert, readers learn on the final page, leaves the Superior Films lot with Hardell's dummy, so life-like as to fool the studio guard and the gateman.

The guard testifies that Hardell, “who’s always been in the habit of exchangein’ a word,” spoke to them as the car drove through the gate: “It’s a great life if you don’t weaken!” (113). After Seibert commits suicide to avoid arrest for his crime, Smith explains the mystery to the guard: “Seibert took the dummy, made up to look exactly like Hardell, propped it up in the seat of his car and drove out. But the dummy did not speak. It was Seibert, mimicking Hardell’s voice who spoke to you” (252). Audible speech, in other words, complements the illusory visual provided by Hardell’s dummy. Anticipating the dummy’s lack of conviction in its appearance alone, Seibert regularly mimics Hardell’s voice to ensure that he fools those he comes across. Earlier in the novel, witnesses tell Smith that Hardell allegedly stopped by a cigar shop on Santa Monica and Hyland—less than a mile from Hollywood Boulevard and the Grauman’s Chinese and Egyptian theaters. When Smith accuses the cigar store’s owner of conspiring with Seibert, a store employee confirms his boss’s alibi, explaining, “Hardell, he calls out: ‘Charge ’em,’ so I come back tells you to charge em” (218). The traffic officer at the Santa Monica and Hyland intersection similarly tells Smith that he saw Seibert and Hardell together: “They was the first car in the line, and that Hardell was using his arm to punctuate his talk” (220). Even a former movie set-builder who works at a construction site across the street from the cigar store—a significant detail in itself regarding the blurring between the backlot and real city—fails to notice Seibert’s illusion: “I was crossin’ the street, and I didn’t get out of his way quick enough after the traffic whistle

blew, and he blamed near cut the pants off me, that's all! Took time to curse at me, too.” When Smith asks who cursed, the man responds, “I don't know. One of 'em,” and then confidently exclaims, “Sure I saw him all right!” (222).

As these witness accounts show, Seibert turns the city into a kind of movie set where the movie magic extends beyond the concrete walls of the soundstage and where non-actors unwittingly participate in a cinematic murder plot. In this way, Seibert turns the talkies into a weapon by taking cinematic methods from the Superior Films lot and exercising them in the most immediate public space: tourist Hollywood. Seibert relies on these men outside the backlot to believe his story precisely because they lack knowledge of film production on private soundstages. Successfully fooling them would allow him to get away with murder, confirming his innocence when questioned by Smith and his men. To a less sinister degree, actors Billy West and Yvonne Beaumont in the novel also use their acting abilities to take advantage of the public. Both confess to Hardell's murder to save one another, but they do so by misleading everyone. Following Yvonne's confession in front of news reporters, a gullible police officer tells Smith, “But Chief, that girl *must* have been telling the truth. Her face, and fainting, and all! ... I tell you, she sure got *me* going, Chief!” (152).

Further, the fact that the men Smith questions can confidently identify and match the sound of Hardell's voice reflects the presence of recording and broadcasting technologies. Although much of *The Studio Murder Mystery* takes place in an enclosed studio lot, the novel explicitly calls attention to radio technology when Smith sits by himself in the soundstage of Hardell's murder:

[W]hile his body rested, his mind became acutely receptive. Deliberately he threw out his conscious knowledge of all the things he had previously developed concerning the crime. He sat, tuned in like a human radio. ... [His eyes] had the appearance of one drugged. ... A languid, half-blind gaze. He was not looking for material evidence, but for those not seen, but felt, impressions that with the truly talented detective are as acute guides as a blood-stained handkerchief! Several times his eyes opened slowly and dwelt, without his conscious volition, on different angles of the set. (178)⁴⁰

Smith initially believes that “putting himself into a receptive state” will grant him access to a kind of retroactive broadcast of what has occurred at the scene of the crime, a soundtrack that offers an accurate representation of events. His faith in the audio contrasts his view of the fabricated “impression” from the nearby film camera, which he notes “did not satisfy him” (179). For Smith, the realm of sound up to this point has remained free from the influence of cinematic illusion, but his trust in radio to deliver a more intimate knowledge—the way studios often promoted radio coverage of their stars—quickly fails him: “How could he hope to receive a clear impression of this particular murder, when undoubtedly other murders, staged for the screen but none the less seemingly violent in action, had been committed upon these very boards!” (179).

⁴⁰ Perhaps a concept the Edingtons knew well, the human radio was advertised in a Chicago magazine *Occult Digest* around this time. For a dollar, customers could learn how to “[t]ransfer your thoughts to your partner as you would on a typewriting machine and your partner answers you secretly the same way.” The advertiser also claims that he has “given demonstrations to Professors, Lawyers, Burns’ detectives, business colleges, etc.” The “Burns” here refers to William Burns detective agency, the same agency employed by the major studios under the direction of Hays.

Because talkies required an actor to *sound* believable, the dialogue Smith might pick up from the radio frequencies become indistinguishable from movie soundtracks. Even as a professional, he feels as helpless as the tour guide from the beginning of the novel in his struggles to separate fantasy from reality. The subtle parallel of radio and the talkies in this scene reflects the reciprocal relationship between the two during the time of the novel's release.⁴¹ Smith's inability to differentiate the fabricated broadcasts of past movie shoots from a broadcast of the actual murder illustrates the extent to which the film industry has absorbed radio waves to reinforce its promotional image.

With broadcast failing to deliver any specialized information, Smith's ability to solve the murder comes from his insight that the studio's facades on the backlot parallel the fabricated personas of the Hollywood elite. As a result of his wartime experience, he sees the general concept of morality not as reflective of "progress and civilization" (Breu 136) but as another socially constructed script concealing some kind of "natural" human instinct. He tells Rosenthal,

[A]ll men are murderers ... There is a time in every human's life when the veneer of custom is thrown aside, at least in the mind, and in such times the taking of another human's life becomes a probability. ... I am convinced that all humanity contains in itself the impulse to take life, should occasions arise that makes it necessary. Wars prove that. (105-106)

⁴¹ As Richard Jewell and more recently Michele Hilmes have explored in great detail, despite the early tumultuous relationship between the film and radio industry, studios ultimately funneled radio technology into a promotional tool that, along with the Hays Office, fortified the moral façade of Hollywood.

Later in the novel as he investigates the empty outdoor sets of the backlot, tainted with “an eerie silence, broken perhaps by the faint, far-distant sound of the city’s life, but strangely removed from it,” he perceives their literal emptiness in terms of human loneliness: “He felt these lone buildings grieved together, in a strange and secret grieving, for habitation within their walls” (168). While Smith’s hard-boiled loneliness is prevalent throughout the novel, he imagines the movie sets whispering in response, “Ah, but we are even lonelier than you. We have not even our own insides to comfort us!” (169). The facades “remin[d] [Smith] of sacked French Villages and the horribleness and unplumbed suffering of War. . . . Dead streets emptied of their human voices . . . For a moment it was as though he heard the chatter of voices . . . of figures long since desiccated” (170). Like an actor, these structures restricted to the backlot have no purpose other than appearing before a camera. The buildings tell Smith that they feel “cheated of their birth rights!” (169), as Minnie Flynn might say at the end of Marion’s novel.

His empathy for these structures and his ability to link them to places far beyond the studio walls allows him to understand that the performance of the Hollywood elite is similarly not restricted to a movie lot. By specifically mapping this critique of the backlot onto those who occupy it, Smith understands many of them as potentially just as void of an interior. If the temporary movie set with “grains of sand on the ground” can appear as “true to the life it represents,” the actor who “become[s] the thing he represents” (73) likewise suffers from a lack of essential morality central to the notion of Victorian masculinity. In Hardell’s case, acting the movie role at the beginning of the novel literally kills him. Morality clauses and studio sets remain constructs, Smith realizes, built for the

sole purpose of reinforcing the industry's illusion. While Smith's philosophy on morality goes beyond Hollywood, he views the film industry—perhaps the most powerful emblem of mass culture—as implicated in the propagation of false moral values through its material and social facades. He tells Rosenthal, “To-day we are living under mass determinations of right and wrong, which have laid down a code barring killings, expect as a safeguard for the masses” (106). The novel, therefore, offered readers a critical lens through which to view morality clauses of industry personnel at a time when such contractual scripts were appearing more naturalized with emerging media outlets.

IV.

Unlike *The Studio Murder Mystery*, set mostly on the backlot with only a brief inclusion of radio, Raoul Whitfield's *Death in a Bowl* unfolds on the streets of Hollywood where radio figures much more prominently. According to Mike Davis, Whitfield himself appeared as an extra in silent film before serving as a pilot in France during World War I (38). Following the war, he returned to the U.S. where he wrote for the *Pittsburg Post* and “develop[ed] the professional writing skills that eventually carried him into the pulps” (Nolan 130). In 1926 Whitfield published his first story in *Black Mask* magazine and went on to write screenplays for Hollywood shortly thereafter, earning his first film credit in 1933 for Warner Brothers's *Private Detective 62*. His experience in Hollywood pre- and post-sound informs not only the hard-boiled tone of *Death in a Bowl* but also the jaded characters who have witnessed firsthand the transformation of the physical and social landscape. Made up of three installments *Black*

Mask during the later months of 1930, the 1931 standalone version of *Death in a Bowl* published by Knopf press begins with a note from Whitfield: “The characters in this book are imaginary.” Such a disclaimer is curious, especially since the novel references many non-imaginary people throughout, including William Desmond Taylor, Will Hays, Lillian Gish, Charlie Chaplin, and Mack Sennett. Central characters might be fictitious, but the world in which they operate is anything but.

An antagonistic force on all fronts, sound in motion pictures serves as the catalyst to nearly every point of conflict in *Death in a Bowl*, sometimes in ways less directly than others. Famous European stage composer Hans Reiner and famous Hollywood film director Ernst Reiner, brothers, each want to showcase Olive Rand’s beautiful voice in their respective productions to showcase her beautiful voice. Hans wants her for his musical stage productions in Paris because he considers her voice “too good for Hollywood microphones” (255), while Ernst thinks she should return to Hollywood to lend her vocal talents to the talkies. Meanwhile, aging film actress Maya Rand, Olive’s older sister, fears that her younger sister’s return to Hollywood will inevitably push her out of the limelight. Hans, in an effort to continue using Olive for his musical productions, exaggeratedly informs Olive “that Maya really hated her, was selfishly keeping her away” (256). Before overdosing on sleep medicine as a result of her sister’s alleged hatred, Olive writes a suicide note to Maya explaining what Hans has told her. Once Hans makes his way to the Hollywood Bowl a few years later, Maya seeks vengeance by hiring an airplane pilot to fly over the Bowl and drown out his orchestration each evening. Protagonist Ben Jardinn’s corrupt partner, Max Cohn, learns

of Maya Rand's plot and attempts to frame her by murdering Hans at the Hollywood Bowl.

In a 1926 promotional short titled "Introduction of Vitaphone Sound Pictures," Hays explains to the audience, "It has been said that the art of vocalists and instrumentalists is ephemeral, that he creates but for the moment. Now neither the artist nor his art will ever wholly die" ("Will Hays"). Given that *Death in a Bowl* is prefaced on the respective deaths of a vocalist (Olive) and an instrumentalist (Hans), which both occur as a result of the talkies, Whitfield's novel directly inverts Hays's optimistic sentiment from a few years earlier. Sound technologies in *Death in a Bowl* hardly inspire tales of survival. To carry out his shooting of Hans at the Hollywood Bowl, for instance, Cohn hides in a small wooden box used for storing radio microphones. Without a storage box for sound equipment, the novel insinuates, Cohn would lack the means necessary to murder Hans discretely. The space of the Hollywood Bowl, moreover, parallels the setup of soundstages on backlots, illustrating the extent to which soundstages—in spite of their enclosure—opened up the possibilities for carefully controlled crime.⁴² If the Edingtons'

⁴² Like the novels discussed in Chapter 1 responded to the studios' reductive depictions of the extra-girl narrative in their films, *Death in a Bowl* more subtly responds to the studios' depiction of these so-called iceboxes on soundstages. *Show Girl in Hollywood* (1930), an early Hollywood-on-Hollywood talkie, uses the sound engineer's icebox as a plot device to uncover sleazy director Frank Buelow's vengeful motives with young actress Dixie Dugan. A later scene shows Jimmy Doyle—Dixie's boyfriend and playwright from New York—leisurely (and conveniently) sitting out of sight in the icebox while Buelow, thinking no else is present, confides in a stagehand: "I'll tell you something funny. I put Dugan up to this. I told her she'd be a great start someday if she was handled right, but that these chumps at this studio didn't know what it was all about." Laughing maniacally, he says, "And the poor little fool fell for it." Jimmy immediately runs out of the box to confront Buelow and says, "Look here, Buelow. I overheard what you said through that microphone" to which Buelow responds, "Yeah, what are you gonna do about it?" The two scuffle briefly, which ends with Jimmy's punch to Buelow's face. As Buelow lies on the floor, Dugan tells Buelow sarcastically, "So you're a big hot shot director, are

novel from two years earlier confined the act of murder to inside the movie studio, Whitfield's novel demonstrates that Seibert's corruption in *The Studio Murder Mystery* has expanded outward to a point where the non-movie person has taken advantage of the city's cinematic aesthetic to carry out crimes outside a studio. Such a critique illustrates how the moral code constructed by the Hays Office fails to represent or prevent the literal and figurative violence unfolding on the streets of Hollywood. Behind the push to make Hollywood's image wholesome lies an interest in profit rather than the well-being of the public.

Opening on a soundstage where Maya and Ernst Reiner film a movie called *Death Dance, Death in a Bowl* immediately draws attention to the recent changes in the studio's infrastructure to demonstrate how the talkies have redefined social relationships, both on the lot and off. Soundproof sets separate the public from the Hollywood elite, as Carey McWilliams declared, but here they also divide the director from the performers, albeit to a less drastic degree. Instead of sitting in a director's chair on the set, Reiner sits next to a sound engineer in an icebox, on a "wicker chair back of the thick glass which made the set below soundproof" (3). He speaks to an assistant from "a French phone" located near "his control board" (3). Framing the novel with a kind of nostalgia for the silent era, Whitfield writes, "This was not like the old days—this talking picture business. He could direct only the rehearsals now. It was the sound he must direct" (4).

ya?" Not only does this scene loosely resemble the encounter between Frey and Reiner, but it more importantly portrays these structures built for sound film as progressive in their ability to uncover the corrupt individuals working in the industry. *Death in a Bowl*, by contrast, depicts these structures as allowing corrupt individuals to conceal themselves.

Death in a Bowl immerses readers as active participants in the plot by subjecting them to theatrical deception in the form of character dialogue. When Jardinn accuses his stenographer Carol Torney of selling him out, he tells her, “I can choke the truth out of you. Who bought you off?” (39). Cohn, witnessing the exchange and worried over Jardinn’s physical aggression, says, “Take it easy, Ben—you may be wrong—” (22). A few pages later, however, readers learn that Jardinn and Carol staged the dramatic episode to deceive Cohn as part of Jardinn’s investigation. “Did he fall for it?” Carol asks, to which Jardinn responds, “Maybe he did ... You put on a good show” (29). By pushing readers to question surface appearances, even when events take place in the real world of the novel, *Death in a Bowl* instills in them a hard-boiled skepticism. Jardinn accordingly understands newsprint, what he calls “the rotten, yellow press” (199), as a form of screenwriting, equally driven by the priority of entertaining to turn a profit. He accuses newspapers of printing “words in place of facts” (57), and when he sees the *Los Angeles Times* headline “Police Have Reiner Clue,” he thinks to himself, “Sure ... They’ve been having clues on the Stannard murder—for three years” (139). For that reason, he finds “it ... difficult, in Hollywood, to distinguish truth from publicity” (25). To show the stakes of Jardinn’s critique beyond the pages of the novel, Whitfield makes reference to William Desmond Taylor’s unsolved murder. After his brother’s murder, Ernst Reiner tells Jardinn, “I don’t want publicity,” to which Jardinn replies, “It’ll bring back newspaper circulation that hasn’t had a story like this since a certain star sprayed lead all over a director named Naylor” (47). Of course, readers of the novel would have been familiar with the sensational coverage of Taylor’s death seven years prior. By

aligning Taylor's real murder with the fictional murder of Hans, *Death in a Bowl* rather subversively dedicates itself entirely to exploring a murder in depth in a way the Hays Office would have restricted.⁴³

Not shy about its opposition to industry politics, the novel draws explicit attention to Hays on the first page. Back in the soundstage, Howard Frey, the screenwriter who has also penned the original novel version of *Death Dance* as well as its screen adaptation, criticizes Reiner's direction of Maya's violent scream: "She wouldn't scream that way. And if you can get [that] piece of business past the Hays office—you're good. . . . It'll never get by—a woman shot in the stomach. You can do that in a book, but we're making a picture. They'll cut it out—and it'll take the guts out of the picture. It'll be a louse—like the last one you made" (4).⁴⁴ The idea that the Hays Office would forbid such material from ever reaching the public makes *Death in a Bowl* all the more provocative, as though the coming pages will provide readers with an unfiltered depiction of Hollywood. As Frey states, "in a book" writers can deliver the unfilmable, in this case beyond Hays's control. Describing the Hays Office as potentially "tak[ing] the guts" from a story points to the irony *Death in a Bowl* explores: The process of systematically

⁴³ In 1937, the Production Code Administration rejected a film titled *The William Desmond Murder Taylor*, claiming "the public exhibition of this picture might have a tendency to misrepresent the motion picture industry" with the industry "foul[ing] its own nest" ("Code").

⁴⁴ While sound pushed both Hollywood film and Hollywood fiction to evolve technically and thematically, the consolidation of the Hays Code in 1930 worked to filter onscreen content more thoroughly than in the silent era. Where specific theaters across the country could edit a silent film to fit their standard of a morally acceptable product without losing much storyline, cutting an "immoral" scene from a talkie could potentially throw off the entire narrative of the film (Maltby 95). As a result, a script had to be more or less finalized pre-production. Regularly attempting to re-work a film after completion would be far too costly. Still, as Thomas Doherty explains, some directors pushed the limit through innuendo not visible on the printed page.

moralizing Hollywood on and off screen often comes at violent and immoral costs that negate the artistic potential of film. In this respect, Whitfield indirectly articulates the Hays Office's failure in its purported agenda to "maintain[] the highest possible moral and artistic standards in motion picture production" (Indiana).

To illustrate Richard Fine's assertion that screenwriters occupied the lower echelon of the studio hierarchy and lacked control over their work, Ernst Reiner responds to Frey's criticism: "If the last picture was a louse, ... it was your work, you see? You made it bad, see you?" (5). Frey, who resents Ernst's wealth because it allows him to film lavishly, tells him, "You've got to have everything—and you still can't get by. You get the best women we've got on the lot. You grab off the pick of stories. You shoot every scene a half a dozen times, and then need more retakes than any director here. ... And still you make flops" (5). In an effort to emasculate him, Ernst points to Frey's lack of autonomy extending beyond his profession: "But in spite of these many faults, I am able to sleep in my own home. I am not forced to spend my nights—" (3). These words prompt the two into a physical scuffle ending with Frey knocking Ernst unconscious. At a meeting with Jardinn shortly thereafter, Frey explains that Ernst's remark suggested his "affair[s] with women who are important, in order to hold my job" (11).

The subordinate male screenwriter, Frey's conditions suggest, closely resembles the extra girl from the silent era. Working for the movies has clearly feminized him as he lacks the income necessary for financial stability. Instead of Minnie Flynn or Sharon Kimm following the direction of predatory men to sustain themselves, someone like Frey has a reputation for relying on the industry's powerful women. Frey even tells Jardinn

that Ernst has “done some rotten things. Not so much with women, but with men. Men he’s worked with out here” (12). The novel’s engagement with the shift in gender dynamics explains why the one extra who does speak in the novel is “[a] tall, good-looking boy” with “a rather high-pitched” voice (78). Indeed, Frey’s work for the studios loosely parallels that of the female stenographers’ in Jardinn’s office, one of whom originally came to Hollywood for extra work. Like a stenographer, Frey can ultimately only write what the studios dictate. It is also significant that Jardinn identifies more with Frey than with Ernst. Although both men hire Jardinn to keep an eye on the other after the scuffle, “[t]here was something about Frey [Jardinn] liked”—a fondness perhaps having to do with Frey’s hard-boiled directness: “[Frey] was direct enough. He wasn’t beating around the bush” (11). Still, Frey’s general lack of control contrasts Jardinn’s private-investigator autonomy, giving evidence to this chapter’s claim that the detective in Hollywood provided a hyper-masculine counterpart for the emasculated male screenwriter.

The Studio Murder Mystery provided its *Photoplay* readership with descriptive detail of the backlot, but *Death in a Bowl* focuses more on the public space of Hollywood to implicate the city itself as a movie studio. As John Parris Springer rightly notes in his brief discussion of *Death in a Bowl*, “the film industry’s affluence serves as a shield for its criminality” (237). The novel integrates the fabric of the city’s cinematic structures to reflect the artificiality of the characters themselves who constantly play roles to mask their corruption—a conflict the novel presents as particular to the Southern California region. Like a movie actor following a script, those Jardinn suspects of murder act “a *real*

part” (124; emphasis in original) and “have perfect alibis. They work that way, out here” (48). Jardinn and Cohn, for instance, frequent “the Brown Derby on Vine Street” (9), an iconic restaurant of early Hollywood whose exterior formed a giant derby hat. Jardinn runs his detective business out of an office located on Hollywood Boulevard, “two blocks from Grauman’s Chinese Theater” (10) and “across the street” from the “the Pig’ N Whistle” restaurant and, implicitly, Grauman’s Egyptian Theater (62). As if to pick up where *The Studio Murder Mystery* leaves off, *Death in a Bowl* begins with Jardinn already understanding the “Hollywood” outside of studio gates as indistinguishable from a movie set, a playground for the Hollywood elite to commit crime and *talk* their way out of trouble. The novel even likens speech to a cinematic facade, describing Cohn’s ability to “g[e]t beneath every word” because “[s]urface talk meant nothing to him” (9).

Three years before *Death in a Bowl*’s publication, Grauman’s Egyptian “introduce[d] to Los Angeles the vitaphone” with the talkie version of *Don Juan* (“Notables”). Jardinn later acknowledges the Egyptian Theater’s specialized sound technology when he tells his stenographer to “go over to the Egyptian and hear Garbo talk” (105). A room in a “frame building” “not particularly well furnished” (10), Jardinn’s office—literally opposite the Egyptian Theater—figuratively works against the fantasy spaces heightened by the integration of aural immersion. In an effort to oppose recording technology, for instance, Jardinn actively destroys any physical records, or recordings, of his insights of the investigation since they may fall into the wrong hands and be reproduced or recontextualized for someone else’s gain—notably a parallel to the

screenwriter's conflict of authorship during the studio system.⁴⁵ Contrary to Howard Frey, Jardinn resists the adaptation of his intellectual property to maintain his sense of what Christopher Breu calls "masculine autonomy" (60). One night in his office, "Jardinn scribbled words on a pad for fifteen minutes or so. They filled five sheets of paper. He burned four of them—and let the ashes drift over Hollywood Boulevard. The fifth he tore into little pieces, lit a match, singed a few of the pieces, and slid them from an ashtray into a wastepaper basket near his desk" (50). Here the material remains of Jardinn's words add a layer of grime to the otherwise sanitized surface of the boulevard. The ephemerality of his writing resonates with the pulp magazine in which the novel originally appeared, known for its cheap material not meant to last. Treating his writing more like a cigarette than a diary also helps to explain why Jardinn continually smokes, as though he finds the toxins from tobacco more real than the commodified "California air" (79). By contrast, to maintain "her picture voice," Maya Rand rejects Jardinn when he "offer[s] her" his "[cigarette] case" (119). The cleaner something appears (or sounds), the more it is implicated in the larger deceptive fantasy of the industry.

Similar to *The Studio Murder Mystery's* acknowledgement of the two strands of fiction that most influenced it—detective and extra-girl fiction—Jardinn credits his "old friend, S. Holmes" for his "careful work[]" ethic (115) and mocks the residual effects of

⁴⁵ In place of a photographic memory prevalent in earlier detective genres, Jardinn writes out the confusing details of the case to commit to memory the dialogue spoken by suspects. Readers of the novel know he can remember things fairly well since they can return to the bits of dialogue Jardinn quotes. "You said: 'I got up here alone—I'll stay here. He's no good, but he can't pull me down. I can get to him—before he gets to me. I'll use his brother.' Or words to that effect; I may have slipped up somewhere" (68).

the extras from the silent days who now roam the street unemployed. Whitfield also makes a subtle nod to novels like *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket*. One might read Maya Rand as a kind of amalgamation of Mabel Normand and Minnie, for instance. Like Normand, Maya “had come up from a low theater” (75) before traveling to Hollywood to “take the pies for [Mack] Sennett, as a start” (70)—a reference to Normand’s early appearances in Sennett’s pie-throwing slapstick. And like Minnie, Maya fights the process of aging as well as the advent of the talkies, at one point lamenting to her assistant director, “I’ll look like hell in a close-up” (78). Early on, when Cohn suggests hiring a new female stenographer to help alleviate the chaos in the office, Jardinn tells him to “look out on the Boulevard” (58) to take his pick of the number of young women walking the street. While *The Studio Murder Mystery* scrams the young movie-struck woman off the backlot at the beginning of the story, *Death in a Bowl* looks to where such women go the moment the industry systematically shuts them out. No longer able to swarm the studios, these young women find stimulation in the backlot-like spectacles on Hollywood Boulevard.

For Jardinn, the amount of young women out of work because of the talkies has contributed to the general corruption of the city. When Jardinn interviews a woman named Edith Brown for the stenographer position, she explains to him why she wants the job: “I came here three months ago, from Tampa. I tried to do picture work—my voice doesn’t go with my face. I can’t get it. If I could whine maybe I’d do. I needed the job—any job” (101). Suspecting Edith has something to do with the murder of Hans Reiner, Jardinn drives down Hollywood Boulevard to Central Casting to see if the bureau has any

record of her. Spearheaded by Will Hays in 1925 and designed in part “[t]o discourage the constant influx of persons as extras” (qtd. in Slide, *Hollywood Unknowns* 65), Central Casting was promoted by *Film Daily* as “a clean bill of health” for the industry (Harrower). By claiming to do away with the “variety of agencies that preyed on screen-struck men and women by holding false promises,” the agency worked to enforce “the moral tone of this business” as “sound and wholesome” (Harrower). Though Central Casting worked in favor of the studios by keeping aspirants away from studio gates, as I discuss in Chapter 1, it has hardly “cleaned up” the Hollywood community in *Death in a Bowl*; instead, it has turned into yet another avenue of potential corruption and false promises. After Jardinn describes Edith’s physical appearance to Leon D’Este, the manager at Central Casting, D’Este exclaims in a “roughneck” voice, “I been with the Central Casting Bureau for two years, Ben. She sounds like an extra type to me. Hundreds of these would-be Gish brats think crossing a street in a mob scene is a bit” (113). D’Este’s view of these young women as mass produced caricatures of actress Lillian Gish, whose career peaked nearly twenty years earlier in D.W. Griffith films, reveals his lack of faith in any one of their careers in the movies. The time of upward mobility, his tone implies, has past. But rather than faulting the young women, D’Este blames what he calls “the lousy game” (113) propagated by the industry. He goes through the motions to keep the myth of stardom alive as part of the industry’s selling points, but Central Casting in the novel proves to be a dead end disguised as a hopeful beginning.

After D’Este and Jardinn spend half hour searching “hundreds of” photos of extras, Jardinn spots some “handwriting that looked like [Edith’s] on the back of a

picture” (193). From the photograph he learns that her real name is “Doll Crissy” and that actress Maya Rand has “paid money to that employment agency” (194-95) to hire her as a spy in Jardinn’s office—a kind of twisted acting job Doll accepts when she fails to find work in the talkies. The appearance of her penmanship, rather than her photograph, leads Jardinn to identify her file. Later he confronts her, saying, “You’ve scrawled messages for me—and I saw your handwriting on the back of a picture . . . [I]t was taken a few years ago, and you wore your hair differently. It doesn’t resemble you too much. But the writing did the trick” (188). Jardinn might be susceptible to the surface appearances, but he continues to conceive of one’s handwriting as an authentic signifier of identity. As Hal Deane gives Minnie Flynn a diary to counter the industry’s image of her, Doll’s handwriting becomes the thing that makes her visible.

Not only have the talkies rendered Doll dispensable and pushed her to accept employment elsewhere, but those higher on Hollywood’s social ladder such as Maya Rand can exploit the unemployed extras to act in real-life situations against their best interests. Instead of speaking in front of soundstage microphones the way she had envisioned, Doll turns into a recording device planted in Jardinn’s office. Such a dynamic among the industry’s social classes further suggests that both sound technology and the Hays Office have ultimately led to far more corruption and immorality than before, each inverting the promotional apparatus that sought to depict Hollywood as an extension of the fairytales on screen.

Aside from the movie palaces, casting bureaus, and restaurants on Hollywood Boulevard, the most prominent Hollywood location featured in the *Death in a Bowl* is, of

course, the Hollywood Bowl. Theater palaces such as Grauman's have an explicit link to movie studios, as *The Studio Murder Mystery* explores, but the Hollywood Bowl from its inception also contributed to the movie-like quality of the city. *The Studio Murder Mystery* begins with Seibert's murder of Hardell on the set of a movie, but the scripted murder on the soundstage in *Death in a Bowl* only becomes real at the Hollywood Bowl, where Max Cohn commits a murder that parallels the one written for *Death Dance*. As if to mirror the murder of Maya Rand's character in *Death Dance*, for instance, Cohn shoots composer Hans Reiner four times. Architecture scholar Carol Reese notes that the outdoor setting of the Bowl also rekindled the atmosphere of the first small "movie studios ... [,] the earliest producers of open-air spectacles in the community" (23). A production at the Bowl in 1916, for instance, featured famous movie actors Douglas Fairbanks and Theodore Roberts in a hugely successful rendition of *Julius Caesar*.⁴⁶ Further, real estate mogul Charles "Mr. Hollywood" Toberman, who spearheaded the development and construction of Grauman's Egyptian and Chinese theaters, singlehandedly championed the construction of the Bowl and "the idea of a space for outdoor community productions" (Reese 14). Architect Lloyd Wright—son of Frank Lloyd Wright—brought his brief experience as a Paramount set designer to the planning of the now-familiar "trumpet" shell.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ It was here that lighting engineer Otto K. Oleson, a popular figure known in early Hollywood for developing indoor lighting for studios in the 1910s (Braudy 78), first used his iconic Kleig lights. Suggesting the link between these spectacles, Oleson's lighting technologies also illuminated the *King of Kings* premiere at Grauman's Chinese Theater (Braudy 79).

⁴⁷ It is worth noting that Lloyd Wright's first attempt at a music shell at the Hollywood Bowl in 1927 resembled a pyramid, resonating with the architecture of Grauman's Egyptian theater.

In addition to its social and architectural roots in movie culture, the Hollywood Bowl also served as a platform for sound innovation, occasionally prompted by movie-related events—one of which took place in 1922 when the Chamber of Commerce hosted Will Hays’s first visit. At the Bowl, Hays explained his newly appointed position as the “director general of the motion-picture industry” to a massive crowd consisting of “the people of the film industry from producer ... to the general public.” The press reported a total of thirty thousand people, a “large crowd” that had “gathered long before ... the gates to the Bowl were thrown open” (“Ovation”). Just prior to the event, the local *Holly Leaves* newspaper even promised local readers that stars would “ac[t] as ushers” (“Will Hays is Coming”). To add to the cinematic spirit, the orchestra from the recently-opened Egyptian Theater played in between speeches. Like a movie premiere on Hollywood Boulevard, the event made Hays something of a makeshift celebrity. In his memoirs, he recalls as “[c]rowds lined the sidewalks” and noticed “everywhere ... cameras were clicking” (Hays 349). Hays told a reporter that he considered the Bowl “of vast importance” in “establish[ing a] healthy relationship between” “the film industry and the people of Hollywood” (Day).

Before Jardinn walks to the Hollywood Bowl the night of the murder, Cohn explains to him that “[a]ll the picture crowd will be there ... It’ll be a big crowd, some twenty thousand or so” (17). Sounding similar to Carl Laemmle’s Universal Studios grand opening in 1915, and prefiguring Nathanael West’s famous last chapter in *The Day of the Locust*, the fictional event at the Bowl has the public “pouring in through the gate” (24). When Maya arrives with her date, “[m]any eyes, as usual, were turned toward her.

... [P]eople were strolling back and forth, watching her closely” (24). The public appearance of Hollywood turns into its own kind of fiction; these spectators watch Maya as they would one of her movies. Maya later tells Jardinn, “I go often to the Bowl and think about other things. ... It’s relaxation, you know,” to which Jardinn cynically responds, “Of course ... And publicity” (75). If Hays sought to moralize both the films and location of the industry, and if these celebrities appear among the general public in part to fulfill their contractual obligations, *Death in a Bowl* questions where the promotional efforts of the industry end and where the real Hollywood begins. On another level, the novel pushes for an understanding of the Hollywood Bowl, a space endorsed by Hays, as one that participates in staging a false sense of community among the Hollywood elite and public.

Intriguingly, Hays’s visit in 1922 also featured the so-called radio car, a vehicle that traveled around the country to advertise the emerging medium by broadcasting concerts from radio station KHJ. A fifteen-minute demonstration of the “radiophone” served as the evening’s opening act, which “broadcast[ed] the greetings of Southern California to Mr. Hays” (“Greet”). One *Times* article—suggestively titled “Greet Hays Over Radio”—opined that “[i]t was quite apropos that the latest twentieth-century invention should have a part in this big demonstration” (“Greet”). Those in attendance, the article continues, had “witnessed something new in radio, that of a message of welcome coming through the air, directed specifically at the guest of honor” (“Greet”). Hays also details this experience in his memoirs, boasting “[t]hat was new and hot stuff in those days, and the *Times* reported that it was the first time such a radio stunt had ever

taken place” (350). Although seemingly insignificant, the depiction of the radio broadcast welcoming Hays as a message floating through the atmosphere offers a subtle link between the arrival of Hays and the arrival of radio in Hollywood. Just as the event celebrated Hays and his mission to clean up the industry, so too did it celebrate the capability of radio technology—two forces that would work in tandem to create a unified representation of the industry, forming a political and technological moral blanket to cover the landscape. Toward the end of *Death in a Bowl*, Jardinn takes advantage of the loud radio music at a nightclub to muffle his private conversation with Carol: “They sat in silence. Carol broke it by staring out at the dance floor and speaking against” “the radio music [that] had a nice beat” (135).

Eventually the direction of broadcast would reverse to cover the Bowl’s musical performances for outside listeners. A *Radio Age* magazine article explained, “the Hollywood stations are providing a good deal of musical entertainment” from “the Hollywood Bowl ... conduct[ing] a series of ten weeks’ open air concerts and as a forerunner of these they are now providing some radio concerts” (Power). The integration of radio at the Bowl indirectly allows Cohn to carry out murder in *Death in a Bowl* as he hides in the “store-house radio box” (258) located fifty yards from the stage, directly behind “the eighth row” of seats (246). Whitfield, typically shortwinded in his hard-boiled prose, gives an unusual amount of focus to the radio box: “[T]he radio box was only slightly raised. Wood planks sloped up from dirt. The box was perhaps five feet above the shell. It was as though a section had been cut from the rising tier of seats, directly in the center. For five feet on either side of the box there were no seats. The roof

was almost level with the tier on which the chairs rested” (246). Upon investigating the Bowl again at the end of the novel, Jardinn notices the box and tells Officer Phaley, “That’s the box they use for the radio stuff—Saturday night,” to which Phaley adds, “They don’t store it there ... It’s just in case of rain” (246). Because the skies had remained clear the night of the murder, Jardinn realizes the box would have been empty. A small space intended to blend in with the rest of the Bowl’s architecture, the radio box from the inside has an “earthy odor” (247), clearly distinct from the concrete tiers of the Bowl. While it might protect the microphones during a concert in the rain, and thereby maintain the ethereal broadcasts, the box also provides a space beneath the façade, failing to protect those in plain sight.

Moreover, the “five feet wide” (247) radio box resonates with the description of the soundstage from the beginning of the novel with Reiner and “the mixer seated beside his control board” in the icebox (3). Just as Reiner “looked down at Maya Rand” from his icebox on the sound stage (4), the radio box at the Bowl looks down over the stage. And like the soundman’s icebox, the box at the Bowl “was filled with sound, dulled but still loud” (249). Jardinn tells Phaley, “This box is well built. It’s thick. Any sound that gets out beats toward the shell. It rolls into the music coming out” (248). The parallel between the icebox on the soundstage and the radio box at the Hollywood Bowl continues to stress the novel’s critique: These spaces constructed for the purposes of recording technologies, which celebrated the growth of Hollywood filmmaking and community alike, have also provided the concealment for immoral acts. Cohn, unlike Jardinn, silently finds himself entranced by the artificiality of Hollywood beauty from the start. In the end, he confesses

that his whole reason for shooting Ernst Reiner was to receive Maya's blackmail money to fund the excessive spending habits of his blonde-haired and "blue-eyed" girlfriend (12): "She was always wanting something. . . . She was always—going to leave me. And I—didn't want—that" (263). Seeing himself as the financial savior to the blonde damsel in distress, Cohn uses the Hollywood Bowl as a stage to exercise his cinematic masculinity.

V.

Not surprisingly, due to their positive reception as novels, studios took interest in adapting *The Studio Murder Mystery* and *Death in a Bowl*. Frank Tuttle, who would later work with Nathanael West on the film adaptation of *A Cool Million*, directed the film version of *The Studio Murder Mystery* (1929). Paramount recognized on the commercial potential in the narrative's appealing soundstage setting, sending press sheets to theaters reading: "The setting discloses the inside working of a talking motion picture studio. All the operations that go into the making of a dialog picture are revealed to the public for the first time on the screen. It is just like making a trip through one of the big Hollywood studios to see 'The Studio Murder Mystery.' *Capitalize on this angle*" (Paramount Pictures; emphasis added). In this way, the studio marketed the film as an updated version of the promotional short "A Trip to Paramountown," as discussed in Chapter 1. Given that Hays encouraged such productions for the purposes of regaining the public's trust in motion pictures, Paramount clearly exploited the Edingtons' novel to provide a glimpse behind the scenes while maintaining their strict "No Visitor" policy. Omitting all

of the more critical elements of the novel, the film was a commercial failure and, in the process of flopping, managed to turn the novel into a comedy. In spite of Paramount advertising the picture as “one of the strangest dramas yet made possible for the screen through the new dialog medium” (Paramount) one film review entitled “Mystery Film Enlivened by Comedy” praised the setting of the “life behind the camera” but criticized the film’s flippancy “[w]ith so serious a thing as murder” (W. Williams). Another review informed readers that the movie “isn’t such a thriller but you’ll like it because it’s shot almost entirely ‘back stage’ on the Paramount lot in Hollywood” (“Lets Go”).

Because of a general concern that those who had already solved the novel’s mystery would not attend the film, *Photoplay* told readers, “Paramount made numerous changes in the story and you will have to see the film to find out whether the original killer is still the murderer” (“Shadow Stage” 1929). The film, however, maintains the novel’s basic premise of Seibert (renamed Borka in the film) murdering Hardell and driving his dummy off the lot. Along similar lines of films like *The Extra Girl*, Hardell in the film version appears in Borka’s movie not because of his any acting abilities but because he has won “that newspaper contest.” Rumor has it that Hardell has slept with Broka’s wife, whom Borka has since sent “back to Europe” as a result. In the opening scene, on the movie set with Hardell, Borka receives a telegram that his wife has died in Europe. According to the telegram, she “died with [Hardell’s] name on her lips.” Rather than murdering Hardell because of his involvement with the occult, as Seibert does in the novel, Borka murders for revenge—no doubt a more palatable narrative device for the movie-going public.

Roughly an hour in length, the film puts Hardell's murder off until nearly half way through, which leads to the relatively delayed entrance of Lieutenant Dirk, the film's version of Detective Smith. As I have argued, the Edingtons' novel articulated much of its critique through Smith's hard-boiled loneliness, but the film blatantly discourages such a tough-guy attitude. After White and Dirk get into an argument over the investigation, Captain Coffee tells Dirk, "No need to get tough, you know. . . . That rough stuff is old fashioned. It's out. Be nice to people. Handle them easy. You'll go further." Perhaps the most interesting difference between the novel and film is that the film version positions the screenwriter Tony White (a character created for the film adaptation) as the protagonist. The film glorifies White as the romantic hero, one who has more intellect than official investigators. Earlier, Helen MacDonald—the studio watchman's daughter and White's romantic interest—is wrongfully accused of Hardell's murder. Because of Dirk's inability to solve the crime (White regularly refers to him as a "big baboon"), White uses his knowledge of screenwriting to reconstruct Burka's murder plot accurately and thereby clear Helen's name. In the climactic final scene, as soon as White solves the mystery, Burka conveniently corners him and holds him at gunpoint, demanding that he drink poison and write a false suicide note taking the blame for everything. In so doing, Burka assures him, Helen will be released from prison. White nearly drinks the poison before someone walks in and interrupts the plan. After the police arrest Burka, the film cuts to the prison where White and Helen embrace. The film delivers a Hollywood happy ending as the two kiss with the "Here Comes the Bride" melody swelling non-diegetically. Needless to say, the film becomes unrecognizable from the novel version.

Indeed, one wonders if Whitfield used the film version of *The Studio Murder Mystery* as inspiration for *Death in a Bowl*. The death of Burka's wife in Europe loosely parallels Whitfield's narrative catalyst of Olive Rand's death in Europe. In any event, *Death in a Bowl* certainly revises Paramount's depiction of the screenwriter as a respected intellect who gets the girl. In Whitfield's novel, Frey essentially drinks himself to death without ever fulfilling a romantic relationship with Maya, and yet he nevertheless takes the blame for murder to save Maya. Frey can easily be perceived as the tragic revision of White.

In a similar act of erasure, studios took interest in *Death in a Bowl* in 1932, but the plot was churned out into what became MGM's B-picture *Moonlight Murder* in 1936. In the novel, there is brief mention of Maya staging a publicity stunt of going to a fortune teller to find Hans's murder. "I heard this Rand gal is calling Madame Wakun in from Pasadena," one officer reports to Jardinn. "She's going to put on a show and look in the glass. She's naming the gent that put the guns in the Bowl—and then the Rand gal is going to put us wise" (82). While *Death in a Bowl* gives two brief mentions of Madame Wakun, *Moonlight Murder* makes this footnote central to the mystery. At the beginning of the film, pompous opera singer Gino D'Acosta, the lead in the Hollywood Bowl's production, sits with a fortune teller in his dressing room who tells him, "Beware. Tomorrow night. It is too horrible. Your life is at stake. If you sing tomorrow night, you will die." D'Acosta laughs in disbelief, but the following night he is poisoned on stage. *Moonlight Murder* rhetorically asks audiences to take the role of the supernatural seriously, while Jardinn immediately rejects such an explanation of Ernst Reiner's death.

Like the film version of *The Studio Murder Mystery*, *Moonlight Murder* completely strips the critical hard-boiled traits of the novel. The young detective, Steve Farrell, whom characters regularly refer to as “Sherlock,” restores the classic detective story by relying largely on science to solve the crime with the help of the young beautiful professor, Toni Adams. Similar to the film version of *The Studio Murder Mystery*, *Moonlight Murder* reverts to the Hollywood happy ending as Toni and Farrell kiss for the final shot. Despite the fact *Moonlight Murder* takes the basic idea of Whitfield’s novel of a murder at the Hollywood Bowl, Whitfield’s name eludes the film’s credits entirely. It instead credits “the original story” to Albert J. Cohen and Robert T. Shannon. While *Death in a Bowl* lodges much of its critique on the space of Hollywood Boulevard, *Moonlight Murder* only focuses on the Hollywood Bowl. On the night of the performance, moreover, the film makes no acknowledgement of film celebrities in attendance. Indeed, the film largely ignores the significance of the Hollywood setting and could hypothetically take place anywhere that features musical theater. Perhaps the most valuable part of the film is the historical stock footage of the Bowl that shows the radio box described in *Death in a Bowl*.

More than simply providing a side-by-side comparison to show how the novels trump the films because of their literary sophistication, I mean to demonstrate that these film adaptations continued to dislodge the critical and counter-promotional content of the novels. As Jardinn feared in *Death in a Bowl*, the studios have taken the Edingtons’ and Whitfield’s words and recontextualized them to the point of erasure. These detective novels have been largely forgotten, but they have served as inspirations for more

canonical texts such as Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, both published in 1939. Chandler's protagonist Philip Marlowe, for instance, a hard-boiled detective like Jardinn, works on Hollywood Boulevard as well. West's Faye Greener frequents Central Casting but also uses her acting to deceive unsuspecting men. Chapter 3, then, will explore the way these novels continue to respond to film technology in relation to the Hays Office, moving from sound to focus on technicolor.

Technicolor Consciousness:
The Production Code, Southern California Boosterism, and a Critique of Whiteness in
1939 Hollywood Fiction

I.

While some filmmakers had experimented with two-strip technicolor in the 1920s, three-strip technicolor had emerged in full force by 1939 with the release of such iconic films as *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*. According to Technicolor's Vice President J.A. Ball, the addition of the blue component in three-strip complemented the green and red filters of two-strip technicolor, providing the screen with a more sophisticated "accuracy of reproduction" (130). In her short essay "Color Consciousness" from 1935, Natalie Kalmus, the so-called Color Director of the Technicolor Corporation, echoed Ball's optimistic attitude; the inclusion of sound less than a decade earlier, she claimed, had "increased [film's] realism through the auditory sense," but the addition of color made "motion pictures ... able to duplicate faithfully all the auditory and visual senses" (139). For Kalmus, three-strip technicolor delivered "enhanced realism" by "portray[ing] life and nature as it really is" (140).

Film scholars have since complicated technicolor's equation with realism or accurate reproduction, of course. In 1978, for instance, Edward Buscombe pointed out in his popular essay "Sound and Color" that technicolor in 1930s film "did not connote reality but the opposite." Drawing attention to its own form, Buscombe argued, technicolor in these earlier films "operate[d] as a celebration of technology," "a form of self-reflexiveness" that rendered "a contradiction of realism." Dudley Andrew has more

recently described technicolor retrospectively as “purer than reality, needing strong artificial light, aggressive, almost whorish” (44). Aside from criticism of its aesthetic, Richard Misek has made the important point that technicolor on the level of narrative “became popular in genres that placed relatively little value on realism” (38), including “the musical comedy, the historical epic, the adventure story, and the fantasy” (Bordwell 355). Still, while three-strip technicolor worked to heighten cinematic spectacle in ways more suitable for fantasy, as these scholars indicate, Hollywood had always promoted the possibility that fantasy could unfold in the real world.

In order to examine the dialectic between popular film and Hollywood fiction, this chapter argues four key points. First, I argue that Southern California boosterism from as early as the 1870s historically formed the aesthetic foundations of several 1930s technicolor films, which employed the region’s various backdrops to showcase technicolor’s capabilities. As Patrick Keating notes, the technicolor film strip encouraged outdoor shooting because it was “balanced for daylight” (208). *New York Times* praised Paramount’s early three-strip technicolor feature *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (1936), shot in the nearby San Bernardino mountains, because it “is not restricted to a studio’s stages” and “record[s] quite handsomely the rich, natural coloring of the outside world” (Nugent 23). Second, I argue that the canonical novels *The Day of the Locust* by Nathanael West and *The Big Sleep* by Raymond Chandler (both 1939) not only engage with earlier generations of Hollywood fiction but also respond to these technicolor depictions and the broader lineage of Southern California boosterism. Long preceding the arrival of the film industry, boosterism had already technicolored Southern California, so to speak. Unlike

the rise of radio in Hollywood that loosely paralleled the rise of the talkies, as I argue in Chapter 2, *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep* view technicolor films set in Southern California as inherently complicit in what earlier booster advertisements had started at the turn of the century. While John Fante's *Ask the Dust* and John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, also released in 1939, focus largely on the empty promises of Southern California, they tend to neglect the film industry's role in the process.

Third, building from the previous two chapters of this dissertation, I read the *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep* as criticizing the extent to which civic boosters and the Hays Office—the groups behind the dissemination and filtering of the images—use the colorful depictions to stress the region's purity in the form of “clean industry” and physical health at the expense of obscuring its racial history (qtd. in Zimmerman). The common selling point of Southern California as a wonderland of health and leisure also implied a sense of morality, away from urban crime narratives manifested in gangster films that the Hays Office opposed. If the Hays Office, as Thomas Doherty argues, operated as a figurative pair of 3-D glasses “that kept images off the screen or out of focus” (98), bright booster images mediated the outsider's image of the Southern California landscape to a similar end. Michael Sorkin has called Los Angeles “the most mediated town in America, nearly unviewable save through the fictive scrim of its mythologizers” (48-49). The Technicolor Corporation, Hays Office, and booster organizations may seem fairly distinct from one another, but this chapter insists that they ought to be understood as cooperative forces, each reinforcing the other to varying degrees.

Finally, I will conclude this chapter by considering Victor Fleming's technicolor classic *The Wizard of Oz*—released the same year as West's and Chandler's novels—as a self-reflexive adaptation of the technicolor films depicting Southern California from earlier in the decade. Through its play with technicolor, *The Wizard of Oz* lodges an allegorical critique against the technological abundance of the industry—a sentiment shared by West and Chandler and taken up by film noir of the 1940s and 1950s. If the early Hollywood fiction from the 1920s responded to film's silence, and if the detective fiction written during the early talkies attempted to counter the pervasiveness of sound, *The Wizard of Oz* marks a significant moment when popular film began engaging critically to its own technologies.

Just as three-strip technicolor was coming into focus, the Hays Office had officially implemented its agenda to determine spectatorship for the movie-going public. Given that the studios used technicolor to complement Hays-friendly genres, technicolor and the Production Code's standard of morality went hand in hand. A 1936 letter from Joseph Breen to Will Hays neatly reflects this point as Breen strategically praises all the forthcoming technicolor films before he discusses the films that “were advised against” (MPAA). In his memoirs, Will Hays notes that by 1939 “the American Motion Picture stood on a mountaintop from which the beacon of its silver screen was sending rays of light and *color and joy* into every corner of the earth” (504; emphasis added). Hays not only conflated technicolor with the moral potential of the screen, but his language (“every corner of the earth”) also entailed a subtle sense of racial superiority. The Code inherited Hays's earlier “Don'ts and Be Carefuls,” which forbade the inclusion of such acts as

“crimes against the law,” “adultery” or “scenes of passion,” and, perhaps most significantly for my discussion, “sex relationships between the white and black races” (Production Code). In attempts to regulate the whiteness on screen, the Hays Office’s standard “Analysis of Film Content” sheet included a section titled “Portrayal of ‘Races’ and Nationals” where the reviewer was required to list all the nonwhite characters in a given film. Because of Hollywood film’s historical assumption that “the white face is the normal face” (Dyer 94), the advent of technicolor inherited and intensified the tendency toward whiteness. While the talkies posed new challenges to the Hays Office,⁴⁸ technicolor would help to reinforce it in part by continuing to favor white performers.

To extend Natalie Kalmus’s idea of color consciousness and to evoke the seminal Marxist notion of false consciousness under industrial capitalism, I want to suggest that characters in *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep* are subjected to and sometimes struggle against what I will refer to as a technicolor consciousness, viewing the world through a lens of whiteness constructed by film fantasy and the broader discourse of consumer culture. As Charles Eckert has documented, Hollywood by the 1930s offered a visual celebration of “fashions, furnishings, accessories, cosmetics, and other manufactured items” (101) and thereby played a profound role in U.S. consumerism.

⁴⁸ The talkies had come with “double-entendres and fast-pitched wisecracks” to the disgust of conservative state censors across the country (Doherty 45). The Production Code itself had been written in 1930, but the onslaught of the Great Depression prompted studios to release morally questionable content since audiences across the country “sometimes cho[se] between food and film” (Doherty 53). As Thomas Doherty succinctly explains, “[m]ore than in 1922 when the moguls had formed the MPPDA to put the best face forward, and more than in 1930, when the MPPDA had acceded to the Code to muffle the protests stirred by sound, Hollywood in 1934 incited a withering barrage of righteous anger and moral opprobrium” (56).

Commercial products appearing as movie tie-ins created a “powerful bond between the emotional fantasy-generating substance of films and the material objects those films contained” (Eckert 117).⁴⁹ More specifically, technicolor in 1930s film mirrored the colorful advertisements that, according to Kathleen Drowne and Patrick Huber, had become regular in newspapers and magazines by the mid-1920s (67). George Cukor’s black-and-white film *The Women* (notably also released in 1939), for instance, features a six-minute technicolor sequence of a fashion show that resembles a kind of magazine in motion as women model clothing against various artificial backdrops.

By adorning and surrounding themselves with the same (techni)colorful products used by stars, consumers could also participate in movie fantasy as characters within a Hollywood romance. *The Day of the Locust* mocks the relationship between mass-produced commodities and cinematic narrative by describing those in Hollywood who dress up in costumes to enhance their otherwise dull lifestyles. Near Vine Street Tod Hackett observes the “blue flannel jackets with brass buttons” and notices “[t]he fat lady in the yachting cap was going shopping, not boating; the man in the Norfolk jacket and Tyrolean hat was returning, not from a mountain, but an insurance office; and the girl in slacks and sneaks with a bandana around her head had just left a switchboard, not a tennis court” (60).

⁴⁹ MGM’s 1939 short film *Hollywood: Style Center of the World* illustrates this relationship between film and material commodities clearly. Set in the mid-west, a young woman named Mary and her father stop by Cinema Dress Shop, whose window displays a dress worn by Joan Crawford in her latest film. The next shot shows Mary trying the dress on inside the shop as she asks the female employee, “You say it’s the same as Joan Crawford wears in her new picture?” to which the employee responds, “It’s styled the same, and it *definitely* reflects the Hollywood influence” (emphasis in original). The narrator voice over explains, “The motion picture has annihilated space, blotted out the back woods, and banished what was once our custom to call ‘the country.’”

Nowhere was the bridge between technicolor film and consumerism made more palpable than with Max Factor's make-up for women.⁵⁰ In *Death in a Bowl*, when Ben Jardinn talks to Maya Rand in the soundstage as "the electricians work[] with the lights," he notices the "startling[]" "pallor of her make-up" (43). In her home, by contrast, Maya's "skin was beautiful; with no harsh, studio lights to strike her she was a gorgeous thing" (67). As this scene from Whitfield's 1929 novel helps demonstrate, the make-up for black-and-white filming was used exclusively for film production. No longer accommodating the "heavier greasepaint paste" used for black-and-white filming (Higgins 87), however, technicolor film required a new kind of make-up for the screen. Max Factor's technicolor make-up promised a "cosmetic color harmony" "so perfect that even a motion picture camera cannot find the tiniest flaw" ("Make-up"). A 1930 Max Factor ad in *Screenland* reprinted a letter written by Natalie Kalmus wherein Kalmus informed Factor that Technicolor's "experts in color photography" admired "the lifelike natural colors to be obtained from the use of [Factor's] powder, rouge, lipstick, eye shadow, etc." "For that reason," Kalmus's letter concluded, "we recommend the use of Max Factor's Make-Up in Technicolor Pictures" ("How You").

Rather than restricting its use to movies, Max Factor—soon included in the Technicolor Corporation's all-or-nothing package to studios—began advertising his cosmetic products to movie fans. In 1935 *Modern Screen* magazine featured a Max Factor advertisement exclaiming, "You can double your beauty if you adopt the make-up

⁵⁰ Sarah Berry has suggested a correlation between color advertising and cosmetics: "Just as product stylists in the 1920s stimulated the market for household products by designing them in vibrant colors, cosmetics began to be produced in an ever wider range of tones by the end of the 1920s" (107).

of the Hollywood stars” (“Three M-G-M”). The following year *Photoplay* ran another ad stating, “In your life, as in the drama of life you see on the motion picture screen, beauty will help you win romance and love. And now you, like the screen stars, may share a new makeup secret which will enable you to make yourself *more attractive, more lovely*, almost instantly” (“Her Enchanting” 87; emphasis added). Like a technicolor film, Factor’s product promised a heightened—if not entirely doubled—sense of visuality to generate something of a Hollywood love story for those who purchased it. Indeed, the public’s everyday use of a product designed to accommodate technicolor’s filming conditions illustrates how technicolor film began to redefine “natural” appearances off screen.

Similar to early Hollywood make-up and lighting tailored for white actors, as Richard Dyer has convincingly argued, the creation of Factor’s technicolor make-up in the 1930s was also generally “limited to white performers” (Higgins 253). In 1935 Factor shared his inspiration for what he called “the standardized types of characters” dating back to early film (Factor 54). Factor viewed a film’s hero requiring make-up “applied . . . in quantities” to achieve a facial appearance “as white as the heroine’s,” while “[t]he villain usually did not apply a coat of make-up . . . A dark blemished skin [for these characters] was more to be desired” (54). In fact, make-up for nonwhite performers evidently was an afterthought. Max Factor told *American Cinematographer* magazine in 1936 that “[s]pecial make-ups for racial groups are also being made . . . Make-ups have already been devised for South Sea Islanders, Eskimos, Negroes, Orientals, and other types” (qtd. in Higgins 253). Factor’s understanding of film’s aesthetic narrative

conventions helps to explain why, in spite of its “transformative qualities” and potential to accommodate a “range of complexions,” technicolor make-up merely sustained a sense of whiteness by allowing white actors to appropriate “exotic identity,” as Sarah Berry argues (125-127).

Factor’s make-up and its political implications reflect the history of Southern California boosterism more broadly. Southern California boosterism beginning at the turn of the twentieth century also functioned as a kind of make-up, one that painted the face of the landscape to obscure its racial history. Although boosterism incorporated Hollywood as a source of advertising, which I have examined at length in Chapter 1 and 2, civic boosters had aggressively promoted Southern California well before the arrival of the industry. Chapter 2 discussed how the talkies changed Hollywood’s landscape for tourists as architecture outside studio gates increasingly resembled a movie set; but the hypercolorful representations of Southern California, to borrow Jean Baudrillard’s seminal thesis of simulacrum, largely preceded the territory for white middle- and upper-class consumers even before the arrival of the movies.

Much has been made of Southern California boosterism, but here I want to highlight the key points that inform the historical context of the novels and films alike. Occupied by rancheros into the late nineteenth century, Southern California quickly became the most advertised area of the country and underwent a fairly rapid change with the development of “[s]ubdivision[s] and the growth of cities” (Starr, *Inventing* 55). Boosterism came in a few different waves over the course of thirty years, the first of which centered on depicting Southern California as a Mediterranean wonderland of

“health and romantic nostalgia” (Starr, *Inventing* 54-55). The region’s climate, as the myth went, could cure people of their illnesses, a selling point conveniently born alongside the extension of railroads to the West and inexpensive train tickets. The reciprocal growth led to the printing of “a diverse literature promoting Southern California as a health resort” (Starr, *Inventing* 55).

At the same time, as every piece of scholarship on Southern California boosterism acknowledges, the burgeoning campaign surrounding the region prompted a need to create “a usable historical myth” of the preindustrial landscape for an “emotional and imaginative connection to the Southern Californian past” (Starr, *Inventing* 55). Enacting a racial borrowing, white boosters looked to the “Spanish cultural and historical presence” to “create a self-congratulatory regional ideal” (Deverell and Flamming 119). Helen Hunt Jackson’s 1884 novel *Ramona* worked to cast Manifest Destiny in a romantic light. In it, amid the wake of the Mexican-American War, the young Ramona—half Native American, half Scottish—marries Mexican Felipe Moreno after her true love, Alessandro, dies from a gunshot wound at the hands of a greedy American landowner. Such a depiction, which became the region’s “official myth” shortly after the novel’s publication, reduced Native Americans to “receiv[ing] the baptism of a superior culture” (Starr, *Inventing* 58). Permeating “popular imagination,” the myth allowed white migrants to “t[ake] some warmth from the banked fires of the culture they had displaced” (Starr, *Inventing* 61). The California missions, for instance, provided material evidence of

not an oppressive past but a romantic one. Indeed, the Mission Inn hotel in Riverside was built in the spirit of the Ramona myth, further promoting the romance to tourists.⁵¹

Meanwhile, a group of white businessmen in Los Angeles, including Harrison Gray Otis, Charles Fletcher Lummis, and Harry Chandler, worked stringently to promote their city to the rest of the country. As Mike Davis asserts, these men aimed “to sell Los Angeles—as no city had ever been sold—to the restless but affluent babbity of the Middle West” (25). The health wave brought Lummis, who would go on to become the editor of *Land of Sunshine* magazine. Frank Wiggins, who allegedly overcame his life-threatening tuberculosis by traveling from Indiana to California, joined the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and wrote for Lummis’s magazine. Otis, who published the *Los Angeles Times* as the “city’s ultimate booster” (Starr, *Inventing* 72), used the newspaper to promote real estate and involved E.H. Harriman of Southern Pacific and Henry E. Huntington of Pacific Electric in the small oligarchy of shareholders. As “Los Angeles grew, ... they prospered” (Starr, *Inventing* 72). Several of the boosters, Mike Davis notes, understood Los Angeles as destined to reign “as the world capital of Aryan supremacy” (30). According to David Fine, “[b]etween 1880s and 1930s Los Angeles was the best advertised city in America” (198).

⁵¹ Not surprisingly, the novels discussed in earlier chapters often depict minorities in the background as antithetical to boosterism’s image. St. Johns’s *The Skyrocket* offers a glimpse into this romantic point of view linked to color by describing the “bygone days” of “the little Spanish town of Los Angeles, ... [p]icturesque ... and brilliant ... , as it throbbed before the adobe walls of the mission church. Senoritas made eyes beneath their mantillas at caballeros in velvet breeches and enormous sombreros. Guitars tinkled. ... Orange poppies and creamy yuccas bloomed” (314). The description reflecting boosterism contrasts *The Skyrocket*’s present day, which St. Johns calls “dirty and filled with Mexicans in overalls, and unshaven men with bleary eyes, and soap-box orators, who drew about them knots of repulsive humanity” (314).

By the early 1920s, tourism would flourish during winter but plummet in summer. To respond to these economic droughts and continue attracting potential residents, boosters developed the All-Year Club, an organization that Todd Gish explains “st[ood] on the shoulders of earlier” booster efforts by stressing the region’s heavenly weather all year round, as its name suggested (392). Gish notes that the All-Year Club, true to booster tradition, only appealed to “Anglo-American tourists of at least middle-class standing” (400). Minorities, when they occasionally did appear in booster images, “would be portrayed as contented labor in the service of tourists or as quaint but harmless ‘local color’” (Gish 400). In addition to borrowing visuals of the classic booster iconography of palm trees and Spanish missions, the All-Year Club integrated images of more modern activities such as “automobile touring” (Gish 410), which Kevin Starr attributes to “ma[king] the tourist industry possible on a mass basis” (Starr, *Material* 96). As one 1926 publication told readers, “There is an All-year Playground that invites any season of the year, that virtually knows no season, that is as attractive in winter as summer” (Milham 1). The sense of personal autonomy that came with a car reinforced the region as a place of leisure and freedom. Even for permanent residents, the car was eventually advertised as a necessity for the full range of the Southern California experience since it could grant access to the natural scenery that cities threatened to destroy. The All-Year Club told readers that “[u]ntil the advent of the automobile, ... the glories of [Southern California’s] beauty was available only to a few” (Milham 19). As I will show, the novels invert this image of the car as providing access to the more natural world. *The Big Sleep*,

for instance, stages a figurative battle between the developing roads and the looming foothills.

Perhaps the most influential branch of Southern California booster advertisement projected to the rest of the country came from the Sunkist orange exchange. Sunkist tapped into many of the promises of other advertisements of the region, including “health, domestic happiness, prosperity, respectability” (Starr, *Inventing* 162). Spreading a taste of California geographically, orange crates shipped across the country featured the colorful illustrations of citrus fields, young people enjoying Sunkist products, or a combination of both. “So appealing in its color,” Starr writes, “the orange inspired graphic ambitions . . . luxuriantly rich in color” (*Inventing* 163). Sunkist’s explicit ties to the natural landscape offered a visual manifestation of health and romance by somewhat ironically using “colors that went beyond nature and spoke directly to fantasy: apricot, purple, cobalt blue, sea green, cinnamon, cinnabar, mauve, yellow, orange” (Starr, *Inventing* 163).⁵²

Like moviegoers throughout the country who thought of Hollywood as the home of the stars, as I discuss in Chapter 1, “millions in the grocery stores of America” experienced Southern California as “a land of fantasy and dreams” through these glowing orange crate images (Starr, *Inventing* 163). In ways similar to a fan magazine or radio show that ostensibly provided intimate and unmediated access to a Hollywood star’s life, oranges purported to offer a direct link to Southern California through the taste buds,

⁵² The production of orange crate labels quickly turned into a business unto itself, as San Francisco lithograph printer Max Schmidt encouraged orange grove owners “to collaborate in the creation of an individualized label” and employed artists to produce what has since become “a significant genre of folk art” (Starr, *Inventing* 163).

adding to the visual and aural representations coming from there. *The Day of the Locust* laments this mass colonization of the senses, describing the so-called people who have come to California to die in the final scene: “Every day of their lives they read the newspapers and went to the movies. ... This daily diet made sophisticates of them. The sun is a joke. Orange can’t titillate their jaded palates. Nothing can ever be violent enough to make taut their slack minds and bodies” (178).

Indeed, Sunkist and Hollywood became increasingly woven together during the early years of the film industry. In his book *Orange Empire*, Douglas Cazaux Sackman concludes his analysis of an early 1920s orange label by observing the likeness between the illustration of a young woman in a citrus advertisement and film actress Mary Pickford. By 1929, Sunkist sponsored film journalist Louella Parsons’s radio show to capitalize on “the allure of Hollywood as an entrée into potential consumers’ homes” (Sackman 105). The radio program included star interviews interspersed with Sunkist ads. On a more stylistic level, visual ads of oranges relied on an approach similar to the invisibility of classic Hollywood storytelling. Sackman notes that “[o]n crates and at garden shows, oranges were presented as pure products of nature that would provide instant contact with California’s therapeutic environment” (88). Concealing the labor pool made up largely of Mexican workers,⁵³ these Sunkist images contributed to the technicolor consciousness of moral purity surrounding Southern California, which Sackman insists became “a simulacrum of Eden” (23); like the movie palaces on

⁵³ Gilbert Gonzalez’s *Labor and Community* (1994) elaborates on the extent to which “the citrus industry depended on the poorly paid labor of minorities—Chinese, Japanese, Filipinos, Mexicans, and women.” The Mexican community in particular, however, “contributed significantly to [its] heralded prosperity” (1).

Hollywood Boulevard, the representation for Sackman began to bleed into the original as “[t]he images created carefully for . . . consumption reached back to shape the landscapes in which oranges were grown” (Sackman 116).

Further, both Starr’s and Sackman’s descriptions of the saturated colors on orange crates sounds strikingly similar to the appearance of three-strip technicolor on screen in the 1930s. Such a connection is hardly a stretch when one considers the technical processes behind their production. Several film historians have compared the technicolor process to that of lithographic printing. Brian Winston, for instance, has pointed out that lithography, a “three-color process introduced commercially in 1812,” anticipated the technical aspect of three-strip technicolor (111). David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson also point out that “Technicolor’s imbibition developing of color relied on a process akin to lithography” (129), while Peter Lev yet again notes that technicolor film’s developing process is “similar to color lithography” (107)—also known as chromolithography.

Unlike standard lithography that used a single stone-based etch to reproduce an image on paper, chromolithography called for an extensive layering process that required the image to go through several different presses for the intended color, much like the film strips of red, green, and blue of the technicolor image. Here I want to take seriously this oft-made comparison in order to link, technically and aesthetically, the chromolithography of Southern California boosterism to the technicolor film representing Southern California.

Sunkist chromolithography bled into other depictions of Southern California, oranges or no oranges. The Los Angeles boosters drew inspiration from the orange crates by dispersing images of a “comparable” “utopian reality” (Starr, *Inventing* 101). As Rod

Kennedy's *Hollywood in Vintage Postcards* (2003) helps show, promotional images of Hollywood lithographed in color around this time had proved a lucrative enterprise. One might also take note of the brightly colored fan magazines covers as central to their appeal on the store shelves. Keeping this in mind, I find it interesting that early three-strip technicolor films—RKO's *Dancing Pirate* (1936), Twentieth Century Fox's *Ramona* (1936), RKO's *A Star is Born* (1937), and MGM's *The Goldwyn Follies* (1938)—frequently set their narratives in Southern California and depict the landscape in ways that closely mirror booster advertisements. *A Star is Born*'s retelling of the black-and-white *What Price Hollywood?*, examined briefly at the end of Chapter 1, suggests the key role played in representing Hollywood, as though earlier black and white depictions failed to capture the film industry in all its glory. But while the latter two films deal with the film industry directly, the former two stress the link between technicolor film and the broader booster campaigns. The lighthearted *Dancing Pirate* tells the story of a theater actor from Boston kidnapped by pirates and taken to a Southern California mission. In a letter to Will Hays, Joseph Breen praised the *Dancing Pirate* as “an interesting romantic picture of early California, shot in technicolor” (MPAA).

Released four months after *Dancing Pirate*, the adaptation of Jackson's *Ramona* definitively demonstrates how boosterism, Hollywood, and technicolor aligned. After a set of credits that includes the logo of the Hays Office's official stamp of approval, the beginning of the film immediately draws attention to its setting: “California—in the year 1870.” Panning colorful images of rural California landscapes, including orange groves trailing endlessly toward the foothills, the film spells out its ties to the early booster myth:

“In this pastoral background Helen Hunt Jackson placed her immortal romance of Ramona.” In place of Dolores Del Rio, the Mexican actress who played Ramona in the 1928 black-and-white version, white actress Loretta Young dons a black wig and technicolor make-up to appear darker. With her “cheekbones tinged with red” (Dick 94), Young’s Ramona served as a technicolor update to earlier versions. By using technicolor to depict the real locations of Southern California and Hollywood in particular, studios capitalized on the hugely popular images and sentiments of boosterism that preceded them, and in so doing, continued to inherit the reductive view of nonwhite communities and histories. In fact, Breen understood the film’s use of technicolor not as a signifier of fantasy but as a tool to heighten its historical accuracy. To Hays, Breen wrote, “I think it quite feasible to have a motion picture made, based upon the facts, which led up to the signing of the constitution of the Unted [sic] States, if a suitable dramatic story could be secured” (MPAA).

Thus, far from a neutral reproduction, as Natalie Kalmus’s “Color Consciousness” essay implied early on, technicolor film—especially those diegetically set in Southern California—tapped into a much larger discourse of consumer culture that resonated with and reified the moral code of the Hays Office. By borrowing iconography from the longstanding booster campaign that had historically whitewashed the landscape, the industry celebrated the region’s promotional history through technicolor and, in so doing, continued to depict itself as a place of romance.

II.

Having already published two well-received novels, *The Dream Life of Balso Snell* (1931) and *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), Nathanael West traveled to Hollywood from New York to write for the movies in 1933. Several critics have called his novel *The Day of the Locust* the quintessential Hollywood novel,⁵⁴ but such a claim tends to ignore West's knowledge of the earlier generations of Hollywood fiction. Situating *Locust* within the larger literary tradition invites a way to read the novel specifically as a critique of technicolor aesthetic and the Hays Office. In 1936, for instance, West worked on the film *Jim Hanvey, Detective*, adapted from a short story by Octavus Roy Cohen that recycled the detective protagonist from Cohen's Hollywood novel *Star of Earth*, briefly examined in Chapter 2. The scene in *Locust* where Tod wanders aimlessly through the backlot sounds strikingly similar to the scene from the Edingtons' *Studio Murder Mystery* when Detective Smith questions the moral ramifications of the backlot's artifice. Echoing *Death in a Bowl*, West depicts radio broadcasting as a deceptive promotional force that fictionalizes the landscape. During a movie premiere at "Kahn's Persian Palace Theater" on Hollywood Boulevard, in spite of the "demoniac" mob that "nothing but machine guns would stop," a radio announcer exclaims, "What a crowd, folks! What a crowd! There must be ten thousand excited, screaming fans outside Kahn's Persian tonight. The police can't hold them. Here, listen to them roar" (176).

⁵⁴ In his book *Cinematic Fictions*, for instance, David Seed calls *The Day of the Locust* "the supreme example of Hollywood fiction" (264). Earlier Lillian Hellman described it as "the only good book about Hollywood ever written" (qtd. in Locklin 67). Chip Rhodes claims that the novel "established the ideological project of the Hollywood novel" (107).

More explicitly pointing to his knowledge of earlier Hollywood fiction, West told his publisher that *Locust*'s dust jacket should "explain[] that the book isn't another ... 'Once in a Lifetime, or 'Queer People,' but that it has a real and 'serious' theme, and that its purpose is not to compete with the novels I listed, but others on a much higher plane" (qtd. in Martin 321-22). The first edition of *Locust* includes a blurb from Dashiell Hammett on the dust jacket, stating, "This is the Hollywood that needs telling about. It's a fine job. I got a kick out of it!" The blurb beneath Hammett's on *Locust*'s cover comes from Dorothy Parker, a screenwriter who co-authored 1937's *A Star is Born*. Parker wrote, "It's brilliant, savage, and arresting—a truly good novel." Given that West was in Hammett's social circle just as Hammett was helping Whitfield sell *Death in a Bowl* to major East Coast publishers, these blurbs each hint at his familiarity with the literary and cinematic representation of the industry.⁵⁵ Such biographical details frame West's novel as operating within the larger context of Hollywood fiction, Hollywood-on-Hollywood film, and the film technology with which each engage.

Because of his experience churning out screenplays, West was well-versed in the Hays Office's Production Code. The same year as *Locust*'s release, West adapted the screen story *I Stole a Million* into a script, which the Hays Office sent back for revisions. Reportedly completing the rewrite in under a day, West consequently received high praise from Joseph Breen for his efficiency. Of the "3,600 stories, scripts, plays, books, novels, etc.," Breen wrote, "it is our unanimous judgment, here in this office, that this

⁵⁵ Not only does West's friendship with Parker point to his familiarity with *A Star is Born* but also with the extra-girl novel of the 1920s from which *A Star is Born* ultimately took its cue.

new treatment by Mr. West is, by far, the best piece of craftsmanship in screen adaptation that we have seen—certainly, in a year” (qtd. in Martin 362). Although *Locust* mentions neither Hays nor the Hays Office as *Death in a Bowl* and *The Studio Murder Mystery* do, *Locust* nevertheless inherits Whitfield and the Edingtons’s critique of showing the side effects of the Hays Office’s agenda to moralize the screen. *Locust*, not restricted to the surveillance of the Hays Office as a novel, repeatedly illustrates the discrepancy between the film industry’s Production Code and those occupying the geographical location of Hollywood. Like the landscape performing to match its own technicolorful representation at the expense of its racial past, characters who inhabit Hollywood attempt to live out a cinematic narrative to fulfill a mass-produced desire at the expense of their humanity. Surface appearances of the landscape and its people threaten to erase any trace of an interior, exemplified by the aging actor Harry Greener: “Harry, like many actors, had very little back or top to his head. It was almost all face, like a mask, with deep furrows between the eyes ... They wouldn’t permit degrees of feeling, only the furthest degree” (119). Harry only exists, physically, for what might have value in front of a camera.

The discrepancy between the Production Code and Hollywood as a place surfaces clearly in the child actor Adore Loomis, who embodies the tension between making films at once morally sound and profitable. As Thomas Doherty notes, after the rigid implementation of the Production Code Administration in 1934, child actress Shirley Temple “whose very name shimmered with religiosity” coincided with Breen’s Catholic traditions as Temple “elbowed aside forty something Mae West as the number one box

office attraction” (77). For Doherty, Shirley Temple’s “presexual innocence” made her “the true golden girl of 1930s Hollywood” under Breen’s leadership (77-78).⁵⁶

West uses Adore, a boy of “about eight years old” (139), to invert the notion of the child actor as moral replenishment. During Adore’s first appearance in the novel, his mother Maybelle Loomis immediately compares him to Temple. She tells Homer Simpson and Tod Hackett, “If it weren’t for favoritism ... he’d be a star. ... What’s Shirley Temple got that he ain’t got?” (138). A self-proclaimed “old settler” who has lived in Hollywood “for six years” (138), Maybelle Loomis subtly calls to mind actress Mabel Normand,⁵⁷ making Adore a combination of Hollywood’s scandalous past and its sanitized present. Such an incongruity explains why Adore suddenly acts as “the Frankenstein monster” in front of Tod and Homer, “roll[ing] his eyes back in his head so that only the whites showed and twisted his lips in a snarl” (140).⁵⁸ Even when Maybelle orders Adore to stop fooling and sing a song, he hardly enacts the presexual charisma in the way Doherty describes Shirley Temple: “His singing voice was deep and rough ... The gestures he made with his hands were extremely suggestive ... [H]is buttocks writhed and his voice carried a top-heavy load of sexual pain” (West 140).

⁵⁶ Further demonstrating how technicolor films generically supported Breen’s agenda, Shirley Temple’s first technicolor feature, *The Little Princess*, began production in 1938, just as West was in the process of revising *Locust*.

⁵⁷ Herb Russell has made the point that Maybelle also elicits Mabel Loomis, “Emily Dickinson’s discoverer,” which positions Adore as another discovery as he “sings a two-stanza song of sexual frustration” (65). Still, given the general scandalous content of the novel that proves antithetical to the Production Code, it is difficult to ignore the ghost of Mabel Normand here.

⁵⁸ Stephanie Sarver has taken West’s reference to James Whale’s 1931 film in this scene as an invitation to read Homer as a similar monster, but Adore’s imitation significantly draws on a black-and-white film. As the passage illustrates, acting like Frankenstein’s monster literally takes the color away from Adore’s eyes, which negates the image of a child actor primed for technicolor film.

After studios largely dismissed the idea of technicolor in the early 1930s, claiming it would “detract[] from the story” or that it would “hurt the eyes[]” (qtd. in Eyman 338), the Technicolor Corporation invited Walt Disney to add technicolor to his cartoons to show the rest of the industry what it could do (Higgins 25). Disney’s *Flowers and Trees* in 1932 became the first three-strip technicolor feature, with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* following suit in 1937 as the first full-length. This historical link between film color and cartoons helps to explain why *Locust* often describes characters as caricatures. Tod Hackett has a “large sprawling body” with “slow blue eyes and sloppy grin” (West 60). Faye Greener, the novel’s femme fatale, has “a moon face, wide at the cheek bones and narrow at chin and brow” (67-68). Like Disney’s *Snow White*, Faye at one point eats “a large red apple . . . slowly, nibbling daintily, her smallest finger curled away from the rest of her hand” (95). Earle Shoop, the cowboy extra who stands over “over six feet tall,” has a “polelike appearance” and “a two-dimensional face that a talented child might have drawn with a ruler and a compass” (109).⁵⁹

In the world of the novel, technicolor has turned the natural landscape—that is, the original source of booster iconography—into an advertisement in itself that attempts to live up to its own fictive representation. Film historian Scott Eyman notes that designers at Warner Brothers in the 1930s, in the process of creating “brighter, more vivid colors” for their technicolor movie sets, would “spray[] a light coat of silver paint on all the trees, shrubbery, and plants so that the Technicolor cameras would pick up

⁵⁹ Earle’s cartoon-like description here is particularly interesting given that West’s 1936 short story, “Bird and Bottle,” nearly identical to *Locust*’s Chapter 14, does not include it. Instead, Earle’s physical description ends with the “polelike appearance.”

surface sparkle” (337). Early on as Tod stares out his apartment window thinking of Faye, he likewise watches as “[a] light breeze stirred its long, narrow leaves, making them show first their green side, then their silver one” (62). This image of the natural landscape saturated in the cinematic runs throughout the text. As Tod walks home from the studio during sunset, he notices “[t]he edges of the trees burn[ing] with a pale violet light and their centers gradually turned from deep purple to black. The same violet piping, like a Neon tube, outlined the tops of the ugly, hump-backed hills and they were almost beautiful” (61). His perception of the hills, determined by an amalgam of color and commercialism (the “Neon tube”), suggests that the visual spectacle of Hollywood has overtaken the entire landscape, not only the architecture that interests the Edingtons and Whitfield. West’s description of the hills, for instance, sounds strikingly similar to David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson’s description of 1930s technicolor films, made up of “deep blacks and vibrant purples and greens” (130). When Tod stares out Claude’s car window later in the novel, West writes, “It was one of those blue and lavender nights when the luminous color seems to have been blown over the scene with an air brush. Even the darkest shadows held some purple” (149).

The saturated colors of boosterism appear again when Tod, Faye, and Earle walk to Miguel’s camp in the hills:

The path ran along the bottom of a narrow canyon ... flowered in purple, blue and yellow. Orange poppies bordered the path. Their petals were wrinkled like crepe and their leaves were heavy with talcumlike dust. They climbed until they reached another canyon. This one was more

sterile, but its bare ground was even more brilliantly colored than the flowers of the first. The path was silver, grained with streaks of rose-gray, and the walls of the canyon were turquoise, mauve, chocolate and lavender. The air itself was vibrant pink. . . . The gaudy birds burst the colored air into a thousand glittering particles like metal confetti. (113)

The “crepe petals” emphasize the handmade appearance of this allegedly natural setting, as though the landscape wears a costume in order to enact the natural. To highlight the sense of performance, the talcumlike dust covering the plants sounds like a layer of make-up powder “bring[ing] out the alluring color appeal,” as Max Factor often advertised (“Three M-G-M Stars”). That the color is tied to the image of metal—the “silver” path and “metal confetti” of the school of birds—reinforces the spectacle’s industrial artificiality underneath the heightened colorful appearance. It is also significant that the further away from the city they go, the more technicolored—or sanitized—it appears. Even the sky participates in this simulation when earlier in the novel Tod likens its texture to “blue serge” material and the moon’s to “an enormous bone button” (70).

While the novel’s technicolor landscape is tailored for its white characters, the minority characters in *Locust* have quite a different relationship to it, either being adapted to and absorbed by it or pushed to its margins entirely. When Tod goes to the saddlery store on Sunset Boulevard, he finds “a wrinkled Indian who had long hair held by a bead strap around his forehead. Hanging over the Indian’s chest was a sandwich board that read—

TUTTLE'S TRADING POST

for

GENUINE RELICS OF THE OLD WEST

Beads, Silver, Jewelry, Moccasins,

Dolls, Toys, Rare Books, Postcards" (172).

Much like boosterism and Hollywood cinema (Tod tells Harry Greener that "Manifest Destiny" is being produced on the backlot [119]), the saddlery store offers a commodified version of the region's past to a middle-class audience. The "dolls" and "toys" point to the store's family-friendly demeanor, while the items on the last line highlight the mass-produced representations, or misrepresentations, of the region's history. Moreover, such an image of the so-called Indian demonstrates how far the simulation has extended since Rosenthal's remarks on the lifelike appearance of the Charles Lindbergh statue outside Grauman's Chinese Theater in *The Studio Murder Mystery*. If the Lindbergh statue promoted the realism of movie magic, the Indian here has become a human advertisement on the sidewalk promoting the historical (in)authenticity of the items sold in the store. Resonating with Todd Gish's claim over booster ads depicting minorities as harmless local color, the Indian literally blends in with the hyperreal landscape of violet and orange, becoming an extension of the promotion.⁶⁰ When Tod visits the store, the Indian

⁶⁰ A more subtle example of this absorption occurs in the middle of the novel at Harry Greener's funeral. Mrs. Johnson, the San Berdoo Arms janitress-turned-capitalist, resents the Gingo Eskimo family for polluting her otherwise picturesque service. She "tried to make to make them go to one of the back rows, but they ignored her orders and sat down in front" (128). Unwelcome in Mrs. Johnson's cinematic vision, the Gingo family feels entitled to participate partly because of their earlier investment in the industry, "ha[ving] been brought to Hollywood to make retakes for a picture about polar exploration. Although it had been released long ago, they

“show[s] the black inside of his mouth, purple tongue and broken orange teeth” (173).

The Indian, *Locust* suggests, can only be understood through technicolor representation that obscures any sense of history. Neither chromolithography nor technicolor provide a palate through which to register his nonwhite appearance. Still, with the jarring “broken orange teeth,” he also represents the cracks of such smooth surface and the inherent incompatibility between the region’s past and its technicolor commodifications thereof.

According to West’s biographer, Jay Martin, earlier versions of *Locust* situated screenwriter Claude Estee as the first-person narrator (312). Of course, West changed his mind for the final version by giving more narrative focus to Todd Hackett, a painter brought from “Yale School of Fine Arts . . . to learn set and costume designing” (West 60). West’s final decision to make the novel’s central character a painter continues to elucidate *Locust*’s interrogation of color. Tod accepts the offer to come to Hollywood because he seeks an artistic challenge, away from the dull the images of “a fat red barn” or “sturdy Nantucket fisherman” that dominate his Ivy League education (81). His time at Yale threatens to standardize his artistic ability as he creates images made to blend in with the background rather than making up the image’s focus. Homer’s house in the Hollywood hills, for instance, comes furnished with the kinds of paintings Tod makes in school, “duplicates” of “a colored etching of a snowbound Connecticut farmhouse” (81). Specifically with an eye for color, Tod hopes to cultivate his non-institutional artistic

refused to return to Alaska. They liked Hollywood” (128). Southern California has introduced them to a lifestyle of consumption. Distinct from their Alaskan roots, they now purchase “smoked salmon” and “white fish” from “Jewish delicatessen stores” (128) instead of fishing from the ocean. In Jay Martin’s biography of West, Martin recounts West’s idea of taking photographs of real Hollywood people to advertise *Locust*. One of which would include, in West’s words, “the racial types, playing Eskimos one week and Hawaiians the next” (qtd. in Martin 340).

interests in Hollywood: “The pleasures he received from the problem of composition and color had decreased as his facility had increased and he had realized that he was going the way of all his classmates, toward illustration or mere handsomeness” (60-61). Perhaps because of his education, Tod convinces himself he can see beyond the Hollywood artifice. When he sits alone with Faye in her bedroom, he thinks that “[b]eing with her was like being backstage during an amateurish, ridiculous play. . . . [H]e saw the perspiring stagehands and the wires that held up the tawdry summerhouse with its tangle of paper flowers” (104). Yet in spite of his belief that his artistic perspective frees him from the technicolor consciousness that absorbs others in *Locust*, Tod ultimately ends up relying entirely on dominant culture for his survival.

In an effort to move away from the more traditional work of “Winslow Homer” and “Thomas Ryder,”⁶¹ Tod finds inspiration in the style of “Goya and Daumier” (West 60). Winslow Homer’s paintings worked “to reinforce the perception of [America’s] greatness” (Kleiner 824) in the mid-nineteenth century, while Ryder belonged to the Romantic tradition and used intense colors in his work (Marter 328). Keeping this in mind, Tod’s investment in the darker political satire of these artists reflects his belief that art can and should counter dominant culture, which in the context of the novel takes the form of popular media. When not working for the studios during the day, Tod works on his anti-booster painting, aptly titled “The Burning of Los Angeles.” If Tod’s labor as a costume and set designer will inevitably blend in with the *mise-en-scène* of popular film, “The Burning of Los Angeles” represents Tod’s effort to counter Hollywood’s visuals

⁶¹ Gerald Locklin notes that by “Thomas Ryder” West “apparently means Albert Pynkham Ryder, perhaps confusing him with Thomas Eakins” (68).

that reinforce Hollywood's greatness on screen with intense colors.⁶² Still, Tod's artistic project—and by extension Tod himself—continually brushes shoulders with the practices of Hollywood production, walking a fine line between technicolor consciousness and artistic resistance. Evoking the process of technicolor film, for instance, the novel specifically describes Tod's painting as “a set of lithographs” depicting the streets of Hollywood (62).

To fulfill his artistic hunger, Tod looks to the crowds in Hollywood, particularly the group who West famously describes as “the people who have come to California to die”—“the people he felt he must paint” (60). Tod finds them fascinating precisely because they remain outside the popular representations of Southern California, those lured by, but not included in, booster advertisements. Instead of enjoying health and leisure or living more fully in the Southland, as boosterism promised, “[t]heir clothing was somber and badly cut, brought from mail-order houses. While the others moved rapidly, darting into stores and cocktail bars, they loitered on the corners or stood with their backs to the shop windows and stared at everyone who passed. When their stare was returned, their eyes filled with hatred” (60). Similar to the saloon window Minnie Flynn gazes into to see own reflection at the beginning of Marion's novel, the shop windows elicit the idea of movie screens and consumerism more broadly. Instead of receiving visual pleasure from the window displays, however, the people who have come to California to die expand the frames of the shop window to encompass the entirety of the

⁶² In this respect, Tod's attempt to produce a subversive painting loosely parallels the gesture of *The Day of the Locust* itself, which West wrote after his day job at the studios as a creative outlet to escape the monotony of Hollywood screenwriting.

Hollywood landscape. Their stillness that contrasts the “rapid” movement of those they gaze upon parallels the relationship between a movie audience and a movie screen. The fact that “their eyes fill with hatred” when the spectacle returns the gaze, for instance, stresses this point that two-way interaction breaks the illusion. Overly stimulated by the onslaught of Southern California advertisement, as the final scene of the novel makes clear, their perception of the real world is indistinguishable from the colorful representations. Refusing to participate within the spectacle of Hollywood while nevertheless addicted to it, the people who have come to California to die typify the extent to which one’s physical experience in Southern California has become altogether mediated, walking freely without moral responsibility of everyday life. These people assume their invisibility yet feel entitled to unending stimulation. Such an attitude illustrates how profoundly the industry’s promotional efforts have stripped the region of any substance in place of commercialism, an intensified version of the young woman from Kansas at the start of *The Studio Murder Mystery*. Indeed, part of *Locust*’s eeriness comes from the fact that, in contrast to a novel like *The Studio Murder Mystery*, the men in charge are nowhere to be found, as though they remain separate from the fictive world they have created.⁶³

But as much as Tod sets himself apart from this group in his ability to recognize the artificiality of the landscape, he remains unwittingly subjected to a technicolor consciousness, which becomes the catalyst for his immoral behavior. Still subjected to

⁶³ Jay Martin similarly observes that, unlike other Hollywood fiction “involv[ing] persons with power wealth and prestige, West ironically refused to include in his Hollywood any level of status higher than the screenwriter’s” (304).

the clutches of consumerism, for instance, Tod “look[s] through the racks” at “a stationary store on Vine Street to buy a magazine” (66). He sees himself as the lead in Hollywood’s most recycled romantic plot, which centers on “boy get[ting] girl, boy los[ing] girl, boy get[ting] girl back” (Shumway 157).⁶⁴ With “a picture of Faye Greener” “pushed into the upper corner of” his mirror, Tod plays the role of a hopeless romantic that Hollywood has taught him to play. Early in the story, true to the traditional Hollywood formula, Tod tells Claude, “I’ve been chasing a girl” (72). But by the end of the novel Tod discovers that the Hollywood narrative fails to function in the place that produces them.

As result of his exchange with Claude, Tod begins to pursue Faye by resorting to more extreme and violent measures. The chapter following his conversation with Claude, for instance, ends with Tod considering Mrs. Jennings’s thirty-dollar fee to sleep with Faye. Although “[h]e didn’t want Faye that way, not at least while he still had a chance some other way” (76), he soon feels that “[n]othing less violent than rape would do” (107). Given Tod’s background as an educated white male raised in a Christian home,⁶⁵ it is ironic that his time in Hollywood elicits desire and behavior antithetical to the Production Code. Gerald Locklin has compellingly speculated that Tod’s “elaborate fantasy” fueling his persistent urge to rape Faye echoes the Fatty Arbuckle scandal of 1921 (Locklin 78), the event that expedited the implementation of morality clauses. In other words, Hollywood has produced the very thing it sought to expunge since Hays’s

⁶⁴ West’s screenplay for *Ticket to Paradise* (1936) notably includes a romance that follows the formula.

⁶⁵ When Tod hears “Come Redeemer, Our Saviour” at Harry’s funeral, he “recognize[s] the music. His mother often played a piano adaptation of it on Sundays at home” (128).

arrival in Hollywood. Tod uses his painting to imagine the unfilmable, envisioning Faye as “the naked girl in the left foreground being chased by the group of men and women who have separated from the main body of the mob” (108), while the Code insisted that “[c]omplete nudity is never permitted” in film (Production Code).

Aside from Tod’s sexual pursuits, his relationship to the automobile provides a way to understand his larger attempt to distance himself from Southern California boosterism while nevertheless relying on it to navigate everyday life. Driving a car in the world of the novel tends to connote one’s participation in or reliance on mass culture. Abe Kusich’s car literally complements his small body, equipped with “special extensions on the clutch and break so that he could reach them with his tiny feet” (165). Given the car’s ability to mediate time and space, not to mention its cinematic implications of a screen-like windshield, it is significant that the novel draws attention to Tod’s lack of car on the first page, even though he lives in a place built “around the automobile” (Starr, *Material* 82). West writes, “On the sidewalk outside the studio he stood for a moment trying to decide whether to walk home or take a streetcar. He had been in Hollywood less than three months and still found it a very exciting place, but he was lazy and didn’t like to walk. He decided to take the streetcar as far as Vine Street and walk the rest of the way” (59-60). As if to prove to himself that he can remain autonomous, Tod allows himself to participate in such technologies only to an extent. Following this scene, the novel regularly reminds readers of Tod’s reliance on those who own cars for his physical mobility. When a group drives to Mrs. Jennings’s smut film screening, “Tod rode in the front of the one Claude drove” (73). Later, Tod “g[ets] in the

back” of Faye’s “battered Ford touring car” as Earle Shoop sits in front (111). After the Waterloo set collapses on the backlot, “Tod got a lift back to his office in a studio car” (135). Finally, Tod and Claude “drove to Homer’s place together” to watch the cock fights in Homer’s garage (149).

If the car represents Southern California leisure and if the police work in the interest of dominant authority—which in this context translates to the Hollywood elite (even the backlot has “a studio policeman” [130])—Tod’s final moment of being “lifted into a police car” (185) reflects his inevitable submission into a technicolor consciousness. Several thematic threads culminate in this final chapter, including the extent to which the police reinforce the separation between fan and celebrity, public and private: “A big squad of policemen was trying to keep a lane open between the front rank of the crowd and the façade of the theater. . . . The police force would have to be doubled when the stars started to arrive” (176). Tod winds up on the side of the protection but at the expense of his agency. The closing paragraphs demonstrate how he has lost all physical control and relies entirely on institutional structures of power: “He opened his eyes and saw a policeman trying to reach him from behind the rail to which he was clinging. He let go with his left hand and raised his arm . . . Tod was afraid to let go until another man came to aid the policeman and caught him by the back of his jacket. He let go of the rail and they hauled him up over it” (185).

At the start of the novel when Tod still views himself as challenging dominant culture and authority, he thinks of “police protection” as “a service for which he had no need” (62). But as the movie premiere indicates, Tod’s privileged upbringing keeps him

from becoming part of the people who have come to California to die, who now turn the tables by making a spectacle of him as he walks through the crowd. His appearance renders him visually incompatible with the marginalized lower classes that fascinate him: “People shouted, commenting on his hat, his carriage, and his clothing” (176). As the crowd threatens to sever his limbs, Tod comes to need the police as much as the studios’ stars do. In addition to his “cracking ribs” (181), the pain from his shattered leg “continue[s] to grow and his whole leg as high as the groin throbbed” (182). While his physical body imposes limits upon his capacity to enact resistance, Tod on some level recognizes that he needs the mediation, some layer of fiction by which to live, in order to survive. In many ways, his painting offers the physical distance necessary to attempt artistic resistance in the first place, which explains why he begins to imagine “The Burning of Los Angeles” as a temporary escape from his physical pain in this scene: “As he stood on his good leg, clinging desperately to the iron rail, he could see all the rough charcoal strokes with which he had blocked it out on the big canvas” (184). But if Tod’s notion of artistic resistance remains at odds with physical revolt, *Locust* questions the possibility of fully breaking from the technicolor consciousness since such an embodied resistance could come at the cost of Tod’s death. After all, no character in the novel can physically exit Hollywood, even when they attempt to do so. Winding up on the side of the “iron rail” (184) of the movie palace, which erupts with “great violet shafts of light” to illuminate its “rose-colored domes” (175), Tod realizes that his site of safety and survival is bound up in technicolor fantasy. Nearly identical to the situation of Mrs. Jennings’s “girls” whose prostitution work includes a “a car and a chauffeur to deliver

them to the clients” (73), Tod’s police escort renders him reliant on the same authority that works in the interest of the Hollywood fantasy.

Combining the various branches of Southern California boosterism to technicolor film, Homer Simpson, a forty-year-old “Middle-Westerner” stricken with pneumonia, travels to Hollywood after “his doctor advised him to go to California for a rest” to rid of his illness, an order Homer obeys because “[t]he doctor had an authoritative manner” (80). In Waynesville, Iowa, Homer represents the perfectly obedient laborer, “working ten hours, eating two, and sleeping the rest” (86). His rigid lifestyle as a hotel keeper entails a conservative moral compass, one that strongly mirrors the Production Code. “[C]onsistently respectful” of nationality (Production Code), Homer sings the national anthem because it is “the only song he kn[ows]” (102). Similar to the Code’s clause that forbade the “use of liquor in American life, when not required by the plot or for proper characterization” (Production Code), Homer takes offense when Harry Greener drinks the complementary “port wine” from the grocery store (92): “[Homer] didn’t approve of people who drank and wanted to get rid of him” (93). Further still, while the Hays Office prohibited the display of “[e]xcessive and lustful kissing, lustful embraces, suggestive postures and gestures” (Production Code), Homer “hurriedly label[s] his excitement disgust” (83) after Ramola Martin’s sexual advances in the Iowa hotel. As if to reinforce the Code’s aim toward racial purity, as I discuss above, Homer represents a particular kind of whiteness, or as the novel puts it, “no one was ever less a Negro than Homer” (143).

Unlike any other character in *Locust*, Homer enters the narrative with no direct ties to media technologies. He wistfully imagines one day “buying a victrola or a radio” (102) and refuses to go to the movies while living in Iowa. As he explains to Faye during their first conversation, “I don’t go to shows very often. The light hurts my eyes” (99). The physical discomfort he feels when watching movies carries over to his experience grocery shopping at the SunGold Market on Hollywood Boulevard, “a large, brilliantly lit place” with “chromium and the floors and walls” (87). Toward the front of the store, Homer observes the “colored spotlights played on the showcases and counters, heightening the natural hues of the different foods. The oranges bathed in red, the lemons in yellows, the fish in pale green, the steaks in rose and the eggs in ivory” (87-88). The oranges by themselves fail to match their colorful representations, appearing dull and inadequate without visual enhancement. As a result, SunGold displays them under artificial lights so they match the technicolorful advertisements shoppers have come to recognize. Not interested in gazing upon the highly spectacular food display, which links to his lack of interest in watching movies, “Homer went directly to the canned foods department” (88). Still, while Homer may embody the perfectly obedient laborer, he lacks the desire necessary to operate as a consumer within a technicolor consciousness. When Faye shares with him her dream of fame, Homer responds, “It’s good to know what you want. I used to be a bookkeeper in a hotel, but...” (98). Homer’s falter here suggests that in Iowa he lived by necessity rather than desire in Iowa, which explains why he rushes toward the canned food section for “his scanty meals” (88).

His romantic interest in Faye, however, signals his movement toward the technicolor fantasy of consumerism. When Tod visits Harry Greener to ask about Faye, Harry tells him, “She went to the pictures with that Simpson guy” (118). Once Faye moves in with Homer, Tod visits him to discuss the “business arrangement” Homer has made with her. Homer suddenly appears obsessed with living up to the colorful images of mass culture. He “t[akes] a housekeeping magazine and fix[es] the tray like the picture in it” (136). Instead of anxiously “walking on the outer edge of the pavement” to SunGold Market (87), Homer buys “a light blue Buick runabout” to act as Faye’s chauffeur (143). At this point, he and Faye regularly “[go] to the movies” (136). As if to solidify Homer’s trajectory into a technicolor consciousness, “he s[its] on an upturned orange crate” on his patio (136). Once bothered by the bright images of orange ads and cinema screens alike, Homer now consumes them in bulk, as his empty orange crate suggests. Later at the Cinderella Bar, Faye even gets Homer to enjoy drinking: “You’re right about the brandy, Faye ... It’s swell! Whoopee!” (145). Homer’s entrance into technicolor consciousness comes at the expense of his Hays-Office values, continuing to spell out the inherent disjunction between the two.

Homer’s tragic end at the movie premiere demonstrates how profoundly his investment in Hollywood fairytale has failed him. Following Faye’s sudden departure, Tod finds Homer in his house “like a steel spring which has been freed of its function in a machine” (171). This image of Homer’s body breaking from its designed function persists at the movie premiere on Hollywood Boulevard. Tod watches as “the policeman guarding [the street] was with a woman whose parcel had torn open, dropping oranges all

over the place” (176). The tendency toward excessive consumption of the technicolor aesthetic has fallen in on itself, similar to the collapse of the Waterloo set. The woman here has purchased literally more than she can handle. Out of their commercial context, as the officer’s involvement implies, these oranges become disruptive to the flow of traffic. Like the oranges that no longer appear picture-perfect when scattered on the street, Adore Loomis at the movie premiere has escaped his mother’s supervision and runs freely, having “torn the pocket of his jacket and his Buster Brown collar was smeared with grease” (180). Tod thinks to himself that his mother “would give him a hiding” to see him so disheveled. Failing to get Homer’s attention, Adore with his “nasty temper” begins “making ferocious faces” at Homer and “r[uns] through a series of insulting gestures” (180). Given *Locust*’s use of Adore as a critique of Hollywood’s attempt at a moral image, it is appropriate that Homer in his moment of disillusion should take out his rage on a product of Hollywood excess. West writes, “Before he could scramble away, Homer landed on his back with both feet, then jumped again” (181). On the one hand, Homer’s killing of a child represents the most immoral act of the novel (the Code lists “child cruelty” under “Repellant Subjects”); on the other, it represents the moment Homer rejects the industry’s moral fantasy of a presexual atmosphere. Understood in this way, Homer’s manifested aggression reflects his self-sacrifice to stop to the futurity of the technicolor illusion. The novel even casts him as a martyr in his final moments: “[Tod] saw Homer rise above the mass for a moment, shoved against the sky” (181).

If Tod and Homer illustrate the incompatibility between technicolor consciousness and the Production Code, Faye's general antagonism stems from her relatively successful efforts to live up to both. When Tod leaves the Greeners' apartment early in the novel, for instance, Faye "kissed him willingly enough, but when he tried to extend the caress, she tore free" (107), as if internalizing the Code's restriction of "[e]xcessive and lustful kissing" (Production Code). She occupies the unreality of consumerism, one that refuses to acknowledge the process behind the production of commodities. In the hills after Tod and Earle retrieve the "trapped bird" for dinner, "Earle tried to show Faye how plump the game was, but she wouldn't look. . . . Faye held her hands over her ears in order not to hear the soft click made by the blades as they cut through flesh and bone" (115). Yet she does not hesitate to eat the bird "heartily" after Earle prepares it over the fire (115). Indeed, her consumer lifestyle leads her own body to become a site of unreality. Following her few moments of sobbing in the novel, she quickly reapplies make-up of "rouge and mascara" by "t[aking] a compact from her pocket and look[ing] at herself in its tiny mirror" (97).⁶⁶ After Harry upsets Faye at Homer's house, she literally exits the line of sight by "ask[ing] if she could use the bathroom" only to reappear cinematically framed by "the doorway" of the kitchen (97). Later on she "fix[es] her tear-stained face" after learning of Harry's death (124). Faye constantly produces an image favored by what Brian Winston calls the "white

⁶⁶ The role of make-up in the novel is established early on with Mrs. Schwartzen, who "had a pretty, eighteen-year-old face and a thirty-five-year-old neck that was veined and sinewy. Her deep sunburn, ruby colored with a slight blue tint, kept the contrast between her face and neck from being too startling" (69).

technology” of technicolor (108) while also seeking ways to complement her image of wholesome femininity as defined by Hollywood cinema.

Always in front of an imaginary technicolor camera, Faye “enjoy[s] being stared at” (94). Her fair skin combined with her artificial “platinum” hair (68) make her an ideal subject for Hollywood backlighting, which Richard Dyer claims was principally concerned with “ensur[ing] that blonde hair looked blonde” (92). An exaggerated version of Eleanor from *Minnie Flynn*, Faye tells Homer, “I’m going to be a star some day ... It’s my life. It’s the only thing in the whole world that I want,” and declares that she will “commit suicide” if her dreams go unfulfilled (98). Upon their meeting, Faye explains to Homer that her father is “an actor. I’m an actress. My mother was also an actress, a dancer. The theatre is in our blood” (98). The theatrical purity Faye describes here continues to highlight—or, more appropriately, *backlight*—her sense of racial purity. The novel even describes her father’s face as “drained white” after his spasm in Homer’s house, a weakness he attempts “to disguise ... by doing an exaggerated Negro shuffle” (99).⁶⁷

Clearly subjected to a technicolor consciousness, Faye explicitly imagines herself within a Hollywood romance, “often spen[ding] the whole day making up stories” (104). If radio coverage provided a soundtrack for events like movie premieres, as I note in Chapter 2, it is fitting that Faye uses the radio as a soundtrack for her bedroom

⁶⁷ The emphasis on Faye’s white appearance and upbringing explains why she sings the song “Jeepers Creepers,” sung by Louis Armstrong in Warner Brother’s 1938 film *Going Places* (released just a year before *Locust*’s publication), as her weapon against Harry’s “horrible” laughter that “he used to punish her with” “[w]hen she was a child” (96). Hearing his daughter sing a song originally performed by a black man is an act Harry “hated as much as she hated his laughter” (96).

fantasies: “She would get some music on the radio, then lie down on her bed and shut her eyes” (104). More important, as Faye “could only love a handsome man and would only let a wealthy man love her” (67), she anchors her definition of handsome in images of white masculinity, as her imagined movie plots indicates. When Faye tells Tod of her ideas for a screenplay, she describes one where the heroine

becomes interested in a young sailor who is far below her in station, but very handsome. ... The sailor refuses to be toyed with ... and tells her ... to go back to her foreigner. ... She falls in love with him, although maybe she doesn't realize it herself, because he is the first man who has ever said no to one of her whims and because he is so handsome.” (106)

Like the Hays Office's fundamental restriction of “low, disgusting, unpleasant” material (Production Code), Faye attempts to police the appearance of what she considers non-normative or vulgar material. She even ridicules Hays-Office enemy Mae West for her weight gain (99) and, reminiscent of Shirley Temple's image on *Captain January* (1936) movie posters, she “dresse[s] like a child of twelve in a white cotton dress with a blue sailor collar” (94). In 1933 the Hays Office sent a to its members explaining, “Attempts have been made to introduce homosexuality into pictures and constant vigilance is necessary to see that this does not happen” (Memo). When Faye, Tod, and Homer watch a show “of female impersonators” (145) at the Cinderella Bar, “a little stucco building in the shape of a lady's slipper” (143), the novel focuses on one performer in particular, described as “a young man in a tight gown of a red silk” (145). His performance “wasn't even theatrical. This dark young man with his thin, hairless

arms and soft, rounded shoulders, who rocked an imaginary cradle as he crooned, was really a woman” (146). “Homer and Tod applaud[] him,” but Faye responds to the performance by bluntly stating, “I hate fairies ... They’re dirty” (146). Faye feels disgusted here precisely because this performer has no place in a Hollywood narrative and, by extension, her life. Indeed, his performance disrupts Hollywood’s construction of femininity and masculinity in equal measures. Since Faye views herself in terms of white purity, associating herself with such a “dirty” and “dark” display would threaten to pollute her image.

Here I need to put my discussion of Faye on hold for a moment to focus on the character of Miguel since they each play a key role in one another’s outcome. According to his biography, Nathanael West took interest in the Mexican community of Los Angeles, “interested in (but not at all amused by) the sordid aspects of that often degraded, minority life” (Martin 272). Aside from his brief inclusion of the Indian character and the Eskimo family, West uses Miguel to illustrate most vividly the technicolor landscape encroaching on the region’s racial past. Miguel has literally been pushed to the margins as he resides in a camp on the outskirts of the city. *Locust* describes his physical appearance as “toffee-colored with large Armenian eyes and pouting black lips. His head was a mass of tight, ordered curls” (113). Rather than participating in dominant culture, Miguel uses industrial and mass-produced materials in unconventional ways to his benefit. Miguel’s camp “consist[s] of little more than a ramshackle hut patched with tin signs that had been stolen from the highway” (113). He uses old “peanut butter jar[s]” as a tequila glass. The description of his attire sounds as

though he rummaged through the waste of a movie studio down below: “He wore a long-haired sweater, called a ‘gorilla’ in and around Los Angeles, with nothing under it. His soiled duck trousers were held up by a red bandana handkerchief. On his feet were a pair of tattered tennis sneakers” (113). These items, particularly the “gorilla” piece, elicit the image of pieces taken from different movie costumes and thrown together haphazardly.

Unlike the other characters, Miguel remains relatively unsubjected to technicolor consciousness when readers first meet him. Antithetical to the section of the Code that listed “[a]pparent cruelty to children or animals” (Production Code), Miguel makes his living by staging cock fights all over Southern California, from Azusa to San Diego. He names two of his birds after the Mexican Revolutionaries, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. He tells Tod, “That’s Villa, he’s a blinker, but still good. And that one’s Zapata, twice winner, a Tassel Dom he is” (114). Miguel’s praise of these figures reflects his distaste for dominant authority. He begins to change, however, as a result of his desire to attain Faye sexually. Given that every man in the novel except Harry desires Faye to some extent, Miguel’s standardized desire begins to position him as a consumer, one whose nonwhite identity slowly slips away in his quest to appear white.

It is important to note that the chapter preceding Miguel’s introduction draws specific attention to the poster hanging on Faye’s bedroom wall:

On the wall of the room beyond the foot of her bed was a large photograph ... used in the lobby of a theatre to advertise a Tarzan picture. It showed a beautiful young man with magnificent muscles, wearing only a narrow loin cloth, who was ardently squeezing a slim girl in a torn riding habit. ...

When she told her story, he knew that this photograph had a lot to do with inspiring it. (105)

For Faye, Miguel—with his dark features, apelike gorilla sweater, and camp akin to Tarzan’s “jungle clearing” (105)—can fill the cinematic image of Tarzan, allowing her to enter into the role of Jane. When the two dance at the camp in the mountains, their interaction even takes on a cinematic quality. Earle watches them as a movie spectator would, unable to “become part of their dance” at the camp because “[i]ts rhythm was like a smooth glass wall between him and the dancers. No matter how loudly he whooped or threw himself around, he was unable to disturb the precision” (117). Of course, Johnny Weismuller, the actor who famously played *Tarzan* from the 1930s onward and whose image presumably occupies Faye’s bedroom wall, was white. In this respect, Faye finds Miguel attractive not because of his exotic appearance but because of the whiteness she can map onto him.

Further, Miguel’s physical appearance shifts as he moves from the hills to Homer’s garage, a transformation that parallels his absorption into a technicolor consciousness. Altering his earlier appearance, Miguel has suddenly started dressing exactly like the “criminally handsome” Earle (109): “They were both wearing blue denims, polka-dot shirts, big hats and high-heeled boots. They looked very *handsome* and picturesque” (150; emphasis added). Faye’s criteria of who she will allow herself to love makes any mention of the word “handsome” significant. Indeed, this moment in the text signals Miguel’s attempt at a kind of racial conversion. At the party when Faye announces to the men that “[t]he refreshments will be along in a jiffy,” she quickly asks

Miguel, “But perhaps you’d prefer a liquer?” to which he responds, “No, mum ... I’ll have what the others have” (157). No longer drinking tequila, Miguel consumes whiskey more in line with the cowboy. He soon attempts to emulate Earle’s every move, turning into a mirror image of him: “He followed Earle across the room to the couch. Both of them took long, wooden steps ... They sat down gingerly with their backs straight, their big hats on their knees and their hands under their hats. They had combed their hair before leaving the garage and their small round heads glistened prettily” (157).

Critic James Davis has asserted that Faye’s sexual encounter with Miguel reflects an act of miscegenation, what he calls “the vessel of tarnished white virtue ... forecaste[d] throughout the novel” (236), but I want to suggest that Miguel’s cowboy clothing situates him in a position of whiteness for Faye. Sleeping with Miguel may not benefit Faye financially, as per her personal criteria, but it continues to meet the standard of loving a handsome man. Understood in this way, she follows the Production Code from beginning to end. She even “ke[eps] the sheets over her head” (170) when Homer walks in the room, as if to censor herself. Rather than Faye giving into some kind of desire beyond her quest for fame, the sexual episode more accurately acts as Miguel’s siren song leading him into a technicolor consciousness, further negating the possibility of resistance within the world of the text.

III.

In a letter to a friend dated December 1939, Raymond Chandler criticized the scarcity of La Jolla’s public library, claiming it only held “one book by Hemingway,

nothing by Faulkner, or Hammett . . . , nothing by Coxe, Nebel, Whitfield, or anybody you would think of as at all representative” (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler Papers* 23-24). As this amusing bit makes clear, Chandler—a fifty-five year old who began his literary career after his termination from the oil industry—admired Raoul Whitfield’s work, hardly surprising given their respective tenure at *Black Mask* magazine. Chandler’s *The Big Sleep*, published nearly a decade after *Death in a Bowl* and the same year as *The Day of the Locust*, draws a significant amount of inspiration from Whitfield’s novel while also updating its thematic concerns. In opposition to any novel I have discussed so far in my dissertation, however, *The Big Sleep* lacks direct ties to the film industry in spite of its Hollywood setting.⁶⁸ But as I hope my reading will illuminate, *The Big Sleep* remains a crucial contribution to the genre of Hollywood fiction as it documents a moment when “Hollywood” definitively extended beyond backlots and soundstages, actors and directors.

In *The Big Sleep* much of the cinematic charm of the city has already become part of everyday life. Instead of focusing on the social significance of the Hollywood Bowl or the Grauman’s Chinese Theater, the novel depicts such structures as simply woven into the landscape’s fabric, as common as any other building in any other city. Movie character names likewise become part of the idiomatic language; one bookstore owner describes pornographer Arthur Geiger as having a “[f]at face, Charlie Chan moustache,

⁶⁸ Indeed, a handful of scholars such as John Parris Springer and Chip Rhodes have considered Chandler’s fifth novel, *The Little Sister* (1949), his first conscious attempt at penning a Hollywood novel. Two years before his death in 1957 Chandler even told a journalist of his desire to “write the Hollywood novel that has never been written” (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler Letters* 230).

thick soft neck” (29). Apartment complexes take “the shape of oil jars [from] Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves” (26), and people generally act in ways that “Hollywood has taught it should be done” (186). Marlowe even describes Joe Brody’s voice as “the elaborately casual voice of the tough guy in pictures. Pictures have made them all like that” (79). While Jardinn attempts to navigate a landscape increasingly eclipsed by film culture, Marlowe occupies a world where technicolor consciousness has come to determine the status quo. One of the few characters whose lived reality remains relatively untouched by cinematic unreality, Marlowe looks to the “the solid, uneven, comfortable line of the foothills” (4) as a touchstone of authenticity contrasting the neatly plotted streets below.

As Michele Hilmes notes, around this time “the cross-fertilization of Hollywood and the radio industry blossomed on a multiplicity of levels” with “radio series based on the characters or situation of a successful film” (70). No longer restricted to the walls of a movie theater, the Hollywood narrative could be consumed more regularly, albeit aurally, in the domestic space. Similar to the way it blends Grauman’s Chinese Theater with the larger landscape, *The Big Sleep* reduces radio broadcast to white noise, so common that it makes up part of the city’s sensorial experience. In front of Joe Brody’s apartment complex, Marlowe notices that “[a] few windows were lit and radios were bleating at the dusk” (76). Later on he observes “[a] moon half gone from the full glowed a ring of mist ... A radio sounded loudly from the house down the hill” (99). Toward the end of the novel Marlowe tells Mona Mars, “There’s no hurry. All this was arranged in advance, rehearsed to the last detail, timed to the split second. Just like a radio program” (197-8). Such incessant media intake feeds the public’s indifference toward their immediate

communal proximity. Even the sound of gunshots, Marlowe says, “don’t mean much any more” (88).

The pervasiveness of media technologies in everyday life explains why Chandler’s novel includes a public body similar to, although not nearly as prominent as, West’s people who have come to California to die. Early on as he and Bernie Ohls arrive at Lido pier to investigate Owen Taylor’s death, Marlowe describes a group of onlookers: “A knot of people leaned out at the far end and a motorcycle officer stood under the arch keeping another group of people from going out on the pier . . . [T]he usual ghouls, of both sexes” (45). Later in the fictional city of Realito, Marlowe drives by the aftermath of a bank robbery, noticing a “fly-cluster of cars in front of the movie theater, a dark bank on a corner with a clock sticking out over the sidewalk and a group of people standing in the rain looking at its windows, as if they were some kind of a show” (182). Though they park their cars in front of a movie theater, the real-life bank scene provides them with more immersive entertainment. Similar to the people who have come to California to die, these people perceive the landscape as a fiction from which they remain detached, not even phased by the rain. Marlowe’s description of such crowds as “usual ghouls” highlights not only his but also his aversion to this brand of spectatorship rooted in Hollywood film but also his ability to resist it.

Inheriting Ben Jardinn’s critiques of the plethora of aspiring actresses on Hollywood Boulevard in *Death in a Bowl*, *The Big Sleep* continues to put emphasis on artificially blonde haired women as byproducts of Hollywood stardom. As Marlowe quips, “[Y]ou have to hold your teeth clamped around Hollywood to keep from chewing

on stray blondes” (128). The only character who “adjust[s] her face by the aid of a pocket mirror” (Chandler 89), Joe Brody’s girlfriend Agnes helps to demonstrate how the technicolor camera has impacted non-studio spaces. Although Chandler never spells the situation out explicitly, Agnes, running the front desk at Geiger’s pornography business on Hollywood Boulevard, treats her job as an opportunity to act (she, of course, has to cover the store’s true identity) and gain the attention of the industry’s powerful men. Even Marlowe can’t help but “admire[] the long line of her thighs” (93).

His initial description of Agnes in Geiger’s “very dim” store (22) makes her sound ideal for a Hollywood camera:

She got up slowly and swayed towards me in a tight black dress that didn’t reflect any light. ... She was an ash blonde with greenish eyes, beaded lashes, hair waved smoothly back from ears in which large jet buttons glittered. Her fingernails were silvered. ... She approached me with enough sex appeal to stampede a businessmen’s lunch and tilted her head to finger a stray, but not very stray, tendril of softly glowing hair. (23)

Following the color composition of a movie set, Agnes’s black dress allows her face to remain in focus. More significantly, Marlowe describes her hair color as natural here, yet her features alter when under the lighting of her rundown apartment: “[Brody] turned his head a little to look at the green-eyed blonde. Not now green-eyed and only superficially a blonde” (83). The appearance of Agnes’s “metallic blond hair” prompts Marlowe to call her “Blonde Agnes,” stressing to her that her appearance doesn’t fool him. Her fantasy of film stardom comes to an abrupt halt as soon as Marlowe shares his knowledge of what

she and Joe Brody actually do for a living. Realizing her technicolor image has failed her, Agnes “reached her silvery nails up abruptly and yanked a hair out of her head and broke it between her fingers, with a bitter jerk” (93).

Marlowe’s understanding of his role as a detective in *The Big Sleep* loosely parallels Tod’s understanding himself as an artist, at least toward the beginning of *Locust*. Just as Tod spends the novel coming across inspiration for “The Burning of Los Angeles,” Marlowe never clocks out of his role as a detective and always keeps the case in mind. At one point his subconscious vision of the investigation sounds strikingly similar to Tod’s depiction of Faye in his painting: “I went to bed full of whiskey and frustration and dreamed about a man in a bloody Chinese coat who chased a naked girl with long jade earrings while I ran after them and tried to take a photograph with an empty camera” (42). Tod’s canvas that ostensibly subverts a cinematic visuality informs Marlowe’s entire way of seeing as he lives to differentiate the surface appearances from the reality lurking beneath them. His career as a detective hinges on his specialized ability to see against the grain and dominant culture by which the middle-class lives.

On a self-reflexive level outside the text, *The Big Sleep* privileges its own material form as a mode of resistance to passive cinematic spectatorship. At a time when such modernists authors as William Faulkner played with colored print in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), *The Big Sleep*’s very appearance of black and white on the page performs a counter to a technicolor aesthetic. Within the text, Marlowe’s association with the literary world sets him apart from other characters who are often modeled after the cinematic world. Aware of the literary lineage of detectives, Marlowe explains to General

Sternwood, “I’m not Sherlock Holmes or Philo Vance. I don’t expect to go over ground the police have covered and pick up a broken pen point and build a case from it” (213). Earlier Vivian tells Marlowe, “So you’re a private detective ... I didn’t know they really existed, except in books” (18), and later even compares him to a novelist: “I was beginning to think perhaps you worked in bed, like Marcel Proust” (55). Though embodying a fictional genre, Marlowe and Chandler—inside and outside of the text, respectively—showcase how fiction provides a different narrative than the print sold to a middle-class audience. After concluding Geiger’s murder case, Marlowe narrates,

I read all three of the morning papers ... Their accounts of the affair came as close to the truth as newspaper stories usually come—as close a Mars is to Saturn. ... Captain Cronjager of the Hollywood Division got all the credit for solving the two slayings in his district. ... It was a nice write-up. It gave the impression that ... Captain Cronjager had solved both murders while lighting a cigarette. (118)

Authorized knowledge of events are published with the agenda of reinforcing the structures of power and present a Hollywood-like happy ending for the public. *The Big Sleep*’s confusing plotlines and sparse prose makes readers active participants in the production of knowledge.

Still, as much as the novel form might supply the tools to remain critically distanced from dominant culture, *The Big Sleep* also laments the novel’s general waning social relevance. Knowledge of books—particularly first-edition novels—take a back seat to more immersive narratives. Geiger can run a pornography business under the guise of

a rare bookstore precisely because of the general public's disinterest in such items. Marlowe sardonically quips that Agnes "knew as much about rare books as I knew about handling a flea circus" (24). Perhaps reflecting Chandler's efforts to distinguish his first novel from his pulp magazine past, the younger generations in *The Big Sleep*, when they do read, pass the time with "horror magazines" (53)—that is, print complemented by stimulating illustrations. In an actual bookstore located near Geiger's shop, Marlowe describes the visually dull and "narrowed cluttered little shop [,] stacked with books from floor to ceiling and four or five browsers taking their time putting thumb marks on the new jackets. Nobody paid any attention to them" (27). In opposition to the crowds, or the ghouls, who live for real-time visual stimulation as a symptom of their technicolor consciousness, Marlowe aligns himself with those very few invested in the literary world who resist the spectacle, a fleeting demographic. Observing the chessboard in his apartment, he thinks to himself, "Knights had no meaning in this game. It wasn't a game for knights" (156). Like the black and white of the page, Marlowe as a knight on a black-and-white board similarly questions his place within an expanding technicolor spectacle.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Yet the novel depicts Marlowe's outdated sense of chivalry as one of the last hopes for a world not completely dominated by technicolor consciousness. In his discussion of the Production Code in relation to Chandler's novels, biographer Tom Hiney points out that "Marlowe novels depicted a world—and language—in complete opposition to what the [Hollywood] censors would accept" (137). One of the general principles listed on the Production Code included the notion that "[l]aw, natural or human, shall not be ridiculed" (Production Code), yet *The Big Sleep* continually ridicules the way "the local law" remains in the hands of upper class criminals like Eddie Mars (*Big Sleep* 72). If the police in *The Day of the Locust* inherently work to uphold Hollywood's promotional facade, Marlowe's lack of faith in legal structures continues to illustrate his critical distance from a technicolor consciousness. When discussing Geiger's porn store, Marlowe explains to Agnes, "Everybody knows the racket exists. Hollywood's made to order for it. If a thing like that has to exist, then right out on the street is

To show how technicolor plays out in the world of the novel, Chandler links the cityscape's neon signs to the unreality of consumerism. In Chandler's *The Little Sister*, as Marlowe drives by shops lining the street, he ridicules the appearance of "gaudy neons and the false fronts behind them" (79). After Eddie Mars's hitman poisons Joe Brody in *The Big Sleep*, Marlowe and Agnes rendezvous outside of Bullock's department store where "[t]he violet light at the top of [the] green-tinged tower was far above us, serene and withdrawn from the dark, dripping city" (180). This brief description of Bullock's illustrates the "serene and withdrawn" quality of technicolor consciousness that consumerism entails, obscuring the focus of the "dark" reality below. As Kevin Starr notes, the Bullock's department store, "an Art Deco masterpiece," "bespoke the confidence and optimism of Los Angeles in 1929" (*Material* 83). Built with the car in mind, Bullock's "oversized windows ... were specially designed to display merchandise to passing motorists" on Wilshire Boulevard (Starr, *Material* 83). Audibly hidden by the "swish of tires on Wilshire" (Chandler 181), Agnes and Marlowe go behind the building's façade—"the east entrance of the parking lot" (179)—to exchange valuable information, reflecting Marlowe's ability to take advantage of the neon spectacles by concealing himself behind them.

where all the practical coppers want it to exist. ... They know where to flush the game when they want to" (81-82). But Marlowe, the self-proclaimed insubordinate to dominant authority, curiously remains the most morally grounded character of the novel. Chandler once wrote in his famous essay "The Simple Art of Murder" that the detective figure "must be ... a man of honor—by instinct, by inevitability, without thought of it, and certainly without saying it. He must be the best man in his world and a good enough man for any world" (18). At one point Marlowe tells General Sternwood, "I do my best to protect you and I may break a few rules, but I break them in your favor. The client comes first, unless he's crooked. Even then all I do is hand the job back to him and keep my mouth shut" (213).

But while Marlowe may be able to hide behind a false front, a commercial structure built upwards, the novel explores the growing complexity of commercialism—no longer floating above the city in form of neon signs but spreading outward, constructed not on top of cement but growing from the ground itself in the form of orange groves. It is not a coincidence that, immediately after Marlowe leaves Bullock's to find Mona Mars, he finds himself engulfed in yet another form of neon commercialism: "I drove north across the river, on into Pasadena, through Pasadena and almost at once I was in orange groves. . . . But not even the drenched darkness could hide the flawless lines of the oranges trees wheeling away like endless spokes into the night" (182). Like the Bullock's building, the lines of the oranges remain visible in the dark rainstorm, visually dominating the natural elements.

As Marlowe drives further away from Los Angeles, the Southern California landscape sounds increasingly aggressive toward the incursion of white capital that threatens its erasure. Nearing the city of Realito, Marlowe narrates,

Cars passed with a tearing hiss and a wave of dirty spray. The highway jerked through a little town that was all packing houses and sheds, and railway sidings nuzzling them. The [orange] groves thinned out and dropped away to the south and the road climbed and it was cold and to the north the black foothills crouched closer and sent a bitter wind whipping down their flanks. Then faintly out of the dark two yellor vapor lights glowed high up in the air and a neon sign between them said: "Welcome to Realito. (182)

Against the foothills situated at the margins, the network of capital takes on a reproductive quality (the packing houses and railways “nuzzle”) that anticipates its inevitable expansion. The train presumably transports the oranges from the local groves, which parallels the export of Hollywood film to the rest of the country. Meanwhile, the foothills watch (or “crouch closer”) as landowners exploit the soil for financial gain. Although the roads are necessarily adapted to the jagged quality of the land, the foothills rage against the smooth illusion that increasingly precedes the territory for outsiders. The neon sign in this passage becomes ironic, of course, because the foothills do everything they can to make the place unwelcoming. When read alongside *Locust*, the foothills in this scene become racially coded with the lingering presence of Miguel. Putting such bright images against the marginal foothills continues to suggest that the fictitious colorful representations belong to white consumers.

Moreover, the perfectly organized cultivation continues to contrast the uneven lines of the foothills. Marlowe can easily hide behind the vertical Bullock’s tower, but the only way to hide behind, or to get beneath, such a horizontal façade of the orange groves is by going underground—that is, by dying. Such a bleak sense of escape provides a way of reading the haunting final passage of the novel: “What did it matter where you lay once you were dead? In a dirty sump or in a marble tower on top of a high hill? You were dead ... , you were not bothered by things like that. Oil and water were the same as wind and air to you. You just slept the big sleep, not caring about the nastiness of how you died or where you fell” (230). Perhaps for this reason Marlowe disregards his own physical body by regularly drinking and, as he describes it, “poison[ing] myself with cigarette

smoke” (30). For him, a physically healthy body faces the constant threat of co-optation at the hands of consumerism.⁷⁰

While Marlowe sardonically quips that the California “sunshine [is] as empty as a headwaiter’s smile” (217), the novel playfully hints at his previous subjection to a technicolor consciousness. Nowhere is his former faith in boosterism reflected more clearly than in his ownership of a convertible, which he tends to reference in the event of a rainstorm: “The air had the damp foretaste of rain. I put the top up on my convertible before I started downtown” (21). As he waits in his car for Geiger to leave his bookstore, he narrates, “The rain drummed hard on the roof of the car and the Burbank top began to leak. A pool of water formed on the floorboards for me to keep my feet in” (30). Rainy weather has become the norm in *The Big Sleep* and floods the advertised sunshine. Rather than complementing the Southern California experience, as the All-Year Club promoted, the convertible becomes a burden for Marlowe, one that renders navigating the landscape more difficult. In *Locust*, Tod refuses to purchase an automobile in a half-hearted defiance of consumer culture, but Marlowe evidently acted much more hastily upon his arrival to the Southland as a fresh-faced investigator working for the District Attorney’s office. Indeed, the narrative voice readers hear in *The Big Sleep* comes from someone who has been duped by the same technicolor fantasy Tod spends *Locust* denying. Still, Marlowe relies heavily on his car, especially when he drives “[f]orty miles” away to find

⁷⁰ Marlowe views a lifestyle of consumerism as coming at the cost of his sense of agency and his moral compass. Toward the end of the novel, after Vivian offers Marlowe \$15,000 to keep her sister’s secret, he tells her, “Now you offer me fifteen grand. That makes me a big shot. With fifteen grand I could own a home and a new car and four suits of clothes. I might even take a vacation without worrying about losing a case. ... Can I go on being a son of a bitch, or do I have to become a gentleman [?]” (228).

Mona Mars at the end of the novel (Chandler 168). His unspoken love-hate relationship to the convertible mirrors his attitude toward Southern California in general.

Aside from Marlowe's convertible amid a rain-ridden city, the wealthy Sternwood family inverts the booster image most prominently, especially given their excessive leisure has threatened their health almost entirely. Just as the Bullock's neon sign remains detached from the reality of the streets, the Sternwood family's colorful yard literally obscures "the old wooden derricks of the oilfield from which the Sternwoods had made their money" (21). Living in the Hollywood hills, they "could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could still look out of their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to" (21). At the beginning of the novel, Marlowe describes their yard as eerily artificial, noting its "emerald grass" and "decorative trees trimmed as carefully as poodle dogs. Beyond them a large greenhouse with a domed roof" (4). The Sternwoods' yard might appear naturally idyllic and appealing in its colorful vividness, but to compare allegedly natural objects—that is, untouched by industry—to a trimmed poodle dog highlights how the family's leisure class lifestyle allows them to hire someone of a lesser socioeconomic status to perform the invisible labor of landscaping, a labor that remains visible to Marlowe.

An oil tycoon, General Sternwood loosely parallels E.L. Doheney, one of the key boosters who "brought in the first producing oil well in Los Angeles" and helped "organize Southern California as one of the greatest promotions the world ha[d] ever known" (McWilliams 130, 157). When readers first meet General Sternwood, he sits within an environment even more processed than his emerald yard. Marlowe walks into

the greenhouse and observes “[t]he glass walls and roof were heavily misted and big drops of moisture splashed down on the plants. The light had an unreal greenish color, like light filtered through an aquarium tank” (7). The General largely depends on this neon unreality, this hypercolorful setting manipulated to intensify the sunlight, for his very survival. “[P]aralyzed in both legs and with only half of his lower belly” (9), Sternwood blends in with the simulation surrounding him. His wheelchair includes a “cord ... plugged into a black cable that wound along side the deep dark green boxes in which the orchids grew and festered” (15). For Marlowe, Sternwood “looked a lot more like a dead man than most dead men look” (214-215) with “[a] few locks of dry white hair [clinging] to his scalp, like wild flowers fighting for life on a bare rock” (8). Instead of embodying the strong white patriarch, General Sternwood has a face that resembles “a leaden mask, with the bloodless lips and the sharp nose and the sunken temples and the outward-turning earlobes of approaching dissolution” (8). His deathlike appearance, the novel later insinuates, is the ultimate result of his leisure practices in Southern California. Carmen shares with Marlowe that Sternwood “r[ode] steeplechases at fifty-eight years old and [was] rolled on by a jumper and crippled for life” (59).

Much of *The Big Sleep* is premised on the assumption that a wealthy, influential family like the Sternwoods have a reputation to protect. Though not involved in the film industry, the Sternwoods have a celebrity status that comes with a moral code. General Sternwood has previously attempted to gain public approval by making his oil field a park, “cleaned up and donated to the city” (21), and when Joe Brody attempts to blackmail Vivian, Vivian tells Marlowe, “The deal has to be closed tonight, or they give

the [nude photos] to some scandal sheet” (58). In spite of their attempts to secure their socioeconomic status, however, General Sternwood suggests that his family has acquired their fortune by regularly disregarding morality. He explains to Marlowe that his daughters have no “more moral sense than a cat. Neither have I. No Sternwood ever had” (13).

Further, Sternwood’s extravagance has rendered a moral lifestyle impossible, just as it has taken its toll on his physical health. His desire to have a family in the first place, for instance, sounds more like a belated publicity stunt to take the public’s focus away from his self-described “gaudy life” (9). Failing to “uph[o]ld” “[t]he sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home” (Production Code), General Sternwood hardly matches the public image he represents as a successful oil man: “If I sound a little sinister as a parent, Mr. Marlowe, it is because my hold on life is too slight to include any Victorian hypocrisy ... I need not add that a man who indulges in parenthood for the first time at the age of fifty-four deserves all he gets” (13). Given the impossibility of a fertile woman at his age, one wonders if Sternwood paid Vivian and Carmen’s late mother to bear his children. When Sternwood opines to Marlowe that orchids have a “perfume has the rotten sweetness of a prostitute” (9), Through the Sternwood family, *The Big Sleep* echoes the sentiment prevalent in *The Day of the Locust*: The technicolor booster fantasy, whether in the form of Hollywood stardom or otherwise, fails to reflect the sense of moral purity of its promotional front. The brighter the surface, the more corruption it attempts to conceal.

Like their neatly landscaped yard, the Sternwoods' whiteness is made to appear natural and desirable to the public, as flawless as the lines of the orange groves. Given that the U.S. acquired a significant amount of Mexican land following the war (including what is now known as Southern California), the novel makes clear that the Sternwoods have been involved in the region's major moments of white superiority. A portrait of "General Sternwood's grandfather" proudly hangs "[a]bove the mantel ... The portrait was a stiffly posed job of an officer in full regimentals of about the time of the Mexican war" (4). Such an excess of whiteness accumulated through the generations helps to explain Vivian Sternwood's unusual bedroom: "This room was too big, the ceiling was too high, the doors were too tall, and the white carpet that went from wall to wall looked like a fresh fall of snow at Lake Arrowhead ... The ivory furniture had chromium on it, and the enormous ivory drapes lay tumbled on the white carpet a yard from the windows. The white made the ivory look dirty and the ivory made the white look bled out" (17). When Marlowe enters Vivian's room for a second time at the end of the novel, he compares it to "[a] screen star's boudoir, a place of charm and seduction, artificial as a wooden leg" (221). Celebrity culture, in other words, becomes the new face of white conquest.

If Sternwood's grandfather participated in colonizing Southern California by pushing Mexicans to the margins, and if Sternwood participated in selling the region while also profiting off its natural resources, Carmen Sternwood inherits a white entitlement by living in the technicolor world her family has constructed over the generations. Carmen, whose artificial "rich[ly] color[ed]" hair contrasts her otherwise

unhealthy appearance and “glisten[s] in the rather dim light of the hall” (5), is the manifestation of several forms of Southern California advertisement. In fact, Marlowe describes Carmen’s “little sharp predatory teeth, as white as fresh orange pith and as shiny as porcelain. They glistened between her thin too taut lips. Her face lacked color and didn’t look too healthy” (5). Reminiscent of Faye’s “swordlike legs” (West 67), Carmen’s teeth render her as unreal and deceptive as the chromolithography of orange crate labels.

As her figurative resemblance to a citrus advertisement reflects, Carmen occupies a technicolor consciousness similar to Faye’s as she attempts to live up to her image in the Hollywood setting. For instance, she clearly identifies with the “stained-glass panel” hanging “[o]ver the entrance doors” of the Sternwood residence portraying “a knight in dark armor rescuing a lady who was tied to a tree and didn’t have any clothes on but some very long and convenient hair” (3). Of course, this image closely matches the scene at Geiger’s house a few chapters later when Marlowe enters to find Carmen naked. Seeing herself as the damsel in distress, Carmen’s technicolorful fantasies determine her lived reality. In Carmen’s eyes, Marlowe has the physical attributes necessary to make him a leading man, the “knight in dark armor rescuing a lady” (3). Upon their meeting in the opening pages of the novel, Carmen calls him “[t]all” and “[h]andsome” (5), a sentiment echoed soon after by Vivian: “My God, you big dark handsome brute!” (19).

Carmen’s excessive leisure has led to her boredom, which has in turn led to her more extreme attempts to live out her prescribed role. Like Faye who works for Mrs. Jennings’ brothel with the unspoken hopes of gaining the attention of “men of wealth and

position” (West 73), Carmen willingly allows Geiger to take pornographic pictures of her for his clientele. With eyelashes like “a theater curtain” (Chandler 5), Carmen significantly requires controlled lighting in an enclosed space to appear natural and pure.⁷¹ Similar to Agnes’s appearance, Carmen’s appearance changes under the hard sunlight. Outside of Geiger’s house during the day, Carmen’s “pale skin had a harsh granular texture” (63), yet under controlled lighting, however, Carmen’s unhealthy skin takes on a smooth quality. When Marlowe finds her in Geiger’s house, “[h]er skin in the lamplight had the shimmering luster of a pearl” (36). And again in his apartment, Marlowe finds Carmen situated in his bed, posed almost too perfectly: “The tawny wave of her hair was spread out on the pillow as if by a careful and artificial hand. . . . She lay there on the bed in the lamplight, as naked and glistening as a pearl” (154-55).

Unlike Vivian who puts on a front for the purposes of protecting her family’s reputation, Carmen operates entirely as a facade controlled by a cinematic fantasy. While Ernest Fontana has argued that Carmen’s epilepsy is a “consequence of Sternwood fathering Carmen at an advanced age” and that “it drives her, independently of her will, to acts of sexual excess and murder” (180-1), I want to suggest that Carmen’s epilepsy more broadly represents the moral and racial contradictions of boosterism, a symptom Carmen literally embodies. Vivian recalls when Carmen killed Rusty Regan, “[s]he came home and told me about it, just like a child. She’s not normal. . . . In a little while she

⁷¹ As Partick Keating notes, the technicolor camera’s slower film stock in the 1930s required “high[er] levels of illumination” (212). Technicolor arc lights, “harder” than the incandescent lights used for black-and-white filming, accommodated “a rugged male star” but posed a challenge for “photographing women” to appear “gentle and delicate” (212). As a result, technicolor cinematographers “compensate[d] by using more diffusion, either on the lamps or on the lens” (212).

would even brag about it” (229). Similar to Faye who “hate[s] fairies” (146), for instance, Carmen calls Marlowe “a filthy name” when he fails to give into her sexual seduction, moving her lips “very slowly and carefully, as if they were artificial lips and had to be manipulated with springs” (157). Such a lack of agency helps to explain why Marlowe regularly describes her in terms of a malfunctioning machine when her romantic (i.e. sexual) desires go unfulfilled. After Marlowe pins the murder of Rusty Regan on her, he narrates, “Her mouth began to shake. Her whole face went to pieces. Then her head screwed up towards her left ear and froth showed on her lips” (220). Like Vivian’s room that appears “bled out” by too many white surfaces, Carmen’s body emits the excess of her whiteness the moments her imagined reality of a technicolor romance begin to crack.

IV.

Instead of spending the last section of this chapter examining the novels’ respective film adaptations as I have done in the previous two chapters, I want to move in a different direction here to consider Victor Fleming’s classic *The Wizard of Oz* as a film attentive to the same thematic concerns as *Locust* and *The Big Sleep*. Not only does *Oz* share their 1939 birth year but it also offers a self-reflexive critique of technicolor and boosterism alike. The remainder of this chapter will argue that Fleming’s film adapts earlier technicolor depictions of Southern California and, in so doing, engages with Hollywood fiction dating back to *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket*.

Comparing the land of Oz from L. Frank Baum’s original children’s books to Southern California is hardly a new idea. Although Baum—originally from Chicago—

penned *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* five years prior to his first visit to Southern California, its “essential storyline,” Kevin Starr explains, “functions as a prophetic probe into the inner imaginative texture of the mass migration of Midwesterners to Oz/Southern California and the Emerald City of Los Angeles down through the 1920s” (*Material* 66). Attracted by the booster campaign, Baum and his wife visited the tourist-driven Hotel del Coronado in San Diego and decided to settle permanently in Hollywood in 1911, living only a block away from Hollywood Boulevard. There, Baum continued to develop the *Oz* book series and even dabbled in film production, forming the appropriately titled Oz Film Manufacturing Company in 1914 before selling it to Universal Studios (Starr 68). Not surprisingly, most of the films he made around this time were adaptations of his novels: *The Patchwork Girl of Oz*, *The Magic Cloak of Oz*, and *His Majesty, the Scarecrow of Oz* (all 1914), to name a few. These early films made in Hollywood suggest that, since its literary inception, the land of Oz was sentimentally inseparable from Southern California and its burgeoning film industry.

In her autobiography, Adela Rogers St. Johns remembers moving near Baum’s home in the 1910s where the two quickly struck up a friendship. Taking a “stroll down Bronson Avenue” “beneath the pepper trees that lined the sidewalks” (116, 117), she nostalgically recalls asking Baum “if he found what was happening around us almost as amazing as what happened when Dorothy was whirled from the plains of Kansas into Oz. He said he did. . . . [W]e were all on our way willy-nilly to the Emerald City—or something quite like it—and the yellow brick road led straight to Pickfair where all kinds of wizardry was going on” (117). St. Johns’s anecdote offers a way to begin thinking

about the presence of Oz in early Hollywood fiction that in turn impacted, if not altogether prompted, the 1939 film version. St. Johns's shared optimism of 1910s Hollywood, for instance, surfaces in the beginning of *The Skyrocket* when a naïve Sharon Kimm, echoing the imagery of St. Johns's stroll with Baum, walks to the studio off Hollywood Boulevard "beneath rows of pepper trees that scattered their red berries and yellow flowers at her feet" (35). As if inhabiting the Emerald City, Sharon feels "the promises, the chances, that lay within this magic city" (35).

Because of its use of technicolor, advertisements for Fleming's *Wizard of Oz* frequently compared the film to Disney's *Snow White* released a year earlier. *Los Angeles Times* writer Edwin Schallert hailed *Oz*'s ability to bring "fantasy ... to the screen in full-fledged form and victory" even more vibrantly than Walt Disney's animated features ("Wizard" 9). Unaware of *Oz*'s capacity for allegorical critique of the film industry, the Hays Office had little concern over what they viewed as a film for children. In September of 1938, Joseph Breen wrote to Louis B. Mayer advising him to take the film's younger viewers into consideration: "In shooting this picture, particularly those scenes with the bad witch, care should be taken to avoid an effect which is too frightening to children. Our experience has shown that such frightening scenes may be deleted by political censor boards, or issuance of a permit for adults only" (MPAA).

One might say that the booster images of oranges impacted the depiction of *Oz* as much as *Snow White* did. Aside from Baum's biographical ties to Southern California, Victor Fleming spent most of his childhood helping his family maintain their orange groves in San Dimas (Sragrow 15), a city thirty miles east of Los Angeles. The Fleming

family had two thousand orange trees to maintain on their property, a grueling task that led to Fleming's father's untimely death from a heart attack amongst the orange groves in 1893 (Sragow 15-16). Fleming's upbringing in the citrus fields and his father's final moments in them indicate that his firsthand experience differed considerably from the chromolithograph fiction depicting the "foothill orange district" of towns like San Dimas (McWilliams 206). Given *Oz*'s awareness of its promotional ties to animated fantasy, it is hardly surprising that Fleming's depiction of Oz appears consciously artificial, what Helen Kim has described as a "clean, bright, glowing Technicolor world ... with plastic flowers, mechanical birds, painted backgrounds, and ethereal, free-floating music" (223). Reminiscent of West's imagery in *The Day of the Locust*, Kim's description reminds us that although both Kansas and Oz were filmed on soundstages, the former appears much less artificial than the latter.

In addition to engaging with the visual ethos of the citrus industry, *Oz* significantly recycles characters from previous technicolor depictions of Southern California. Frank Morgan, the white actor who plays the wizard, for instance, played the Latino character Mayor Don Emilio Perena in *The Dancing Pirate* (1936), a film I discuss briefly in this chapter's introduction. Clara Bandick, the actress who plays Aunt Em has a nearly identical role in *A Star is Born*, released two years earlier. In it, she plays Esther's Auntie Mattie, a stern Midwestern woman who discourages Esther from having dreams of stardom. She calls Esther "a silly little girl whose head has been turned by the movies." For the part of Dorothy, some at MGM wanted the young Shirley Temple, the number one box office sensation three years running. Producer Mervyn LeRoy, however,

allegedly pushed for the casting of Judy Garland: “I always wanted Judy Garland. On account of her voice. On account of her personality. She *looked* more like Dorothy than Shirley Temple did” (qtd. in Harnetz 111). LeRoy’s final comment here is interesting, especially since Baum’s original children’s books put Dorothy at around five or six years old, closer to Temple’s age. As Aljean Harnetz notes, “Sixteen-year-old Judy Garland might be carefully corseted and dressed in gingham to appear twelve, but she could never have made believable the simple, uncritical acceptance of the very young child who was Dorothy in the book” (40). Judy Garland’s Dorothy, rather than taking its cue from Baum’s novels, falls more in line with redhead Esther Blodgett (later turned Vicki Lester) in *A Star is Born* played by Janet Gaynor. Indeed, Garland’s starring as Esther Blodgett in the 1954 remake of *A Star is Born* (directed by George Cukor, who also directed pieces of *Oz* without credit) makes this link all too clear.

Of course, given St. Johns’s “original story” credit for *What Price Hollywood?* and *A Star is Born*’s technicolor retelling of *What Price Hollywood?*, the novels *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* share DNA—however distant—with *A Star is Born* and, to push it, *The Wizard of Oz*. A redhead like Minnie Flynn and Sharon Kimm, Dorothy travels to the Emerald City where she ultimately learns that the Wizard is a sham who has built the magnificence of Oz on a lie. During the tornado that sends Dorothy’s house spiraling to Oz, the camera shows a medium shot of Dorothy’s backside as she sits on her bed with Toto. Dorothy and Toto watch through her bedroom window as several fantastic images pass by, including Miss Gulch’s transformation into the Wicked Witch. Dorothy’s window in this scene parallels a movie screen, and the viewer watches Dorothy on a

screen while she watches yet another screen. In this respect, rather than situating viewers to identify with Dorothy, the film self-reflexively positions the viewer to remain critically detached from the technicolor consciousness that Dorothy initially accepts upon her arrival. While Tod and Marlowe recognize the Southern Californian artificiality, Dorothy spends the narrative learning how to see it.

To extend the Hollywood allegory, the “great and powerful” Wizard takes on the role of a Hollywood mogul who projects larger-than-life images to manipulate the people of Oz. When Dorothy, Tinman, Scarecrow, and the Lion first visit the Wizard in the Emerald City, for instance, they believe in the projection of the green moonlike face on the wall, surrounded by flames and smoke, who tells them, “I am Oz, the great and powerful!” The moment Toto exposes the actual Wizard shouting into a microphone in the corner of the room, the Wizard utters the famous line, “Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain!” Such a sentiment—that is, those in power concealing themselves with the illusion they have created—figures prominently in *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep*. The promised land of Oz, like Southern California in the fiction of West and Chandler, does not live up to its image as that somewhere over the rainbow.

Visually informed by boosterism and technicolor depictions of the Southland, *Oz* also came from the pens of alcoholic and disillusioned screenwriters, people who West and Chandler would have considered comrades. Of the ten writers, Herman Mankiewicz began the blueprint for what would later become the screenplay. Mankiewicz, whose drinking habits had hindered his employment at nearly every studio, evidently came up with the now-iconic idea of contrasting the black-and-white Kansas to the artificial

technicolor landscape of Oz. On the first page of his 1938 screen treatment, he carefully emphasized that “every effort should be made ... to emphasize the grey nature of the landscape and Dorothy’s real life” before the narrative’s shift to technicolor (qtd. in Harnetz 27). If Oz signifies the spectacle-driven Southern California, the black-and-white Kansas anticipates a noir depiction of the world. Following Mankiewicz’s dismissal, writer Noel Langley, a lonely British writer who at the young age of twenty-six viewed the industry and screenwriting as “art and fair play” (Harnetz 31), began contributing to the screenplay. Although the final version of the film credits Langley as the head writer and sole adapter of Baum’s novel, MGM’s Louis B. Mayer reportedly blacklisted him after Langley said sardonically to some MGM coworkers, “Every time Mayer smiles at me, I feel a snake has crawled over my foot” (qtd. in Harnetz 42).

Langley’s unpleasant experience working on *The Wizard of Oz* led him to write a novel titled *Hocus Pocus* in 1941.⁷² Dedicated to “THE BOYS ON THE BLACK LIST,” Langley’s novel takes the first-person perspective of Pearl O’Hara, a nineteen year old movie-struck woman who “work[s] for a dress house as a mannequin” in New York (2). When her fiancé submits her modeling photographs to the local newspaper and embellishes her back-story, Pearl’s dream of fame slowly begins to materialize. Shortly after her career as a model takes off, one character tells her that the public now “want[s] to see how you move and talk and laugh and cry and eat and sleep and a hundred other things. And how they gonna do that? Listen: they’re gonna see you on a screen, with your

⁷² Both Anthony Slide’s and Nancy Brooker-Bower’s respective bibliographies on the Hollywood novel incorrectly list *Hocus Pocus* as published in 1952. Such an error detaches the novel temporally from Langley’s experience working on *The Wizard of Oz*.

voice coming through a horn, in a movie theatre” (27). Not surprisingly, the novel mocks anyone who has political sway in Hollywood, including Dante Gabriel Rossetenstein who runs the fictional Star-Spangled Olympic studio. Characters names range from “Mr. Titz” to “Mr. Färtfinger,” and studio heads bet on a horse with the name *Hard On*. Pearl describes one of her acquaintances as “a guy whose idea of the perfect lay was Minnie Mouse” (70). She even spends a weekend with “two friends, sisters; they used to do an act in Burlesque but one of them married a man in the Hays office so they both had to quit” (115). But as strange as this world may sound to readers, Langley anchors it in nonfiction by sprinkling actual names of Hollywood people throughout, including Adolph Zukor, Sam Goldwyn, the Warner brothers, George Cukor, David Selznick, Constance Bennett, and Cark Gable. Clearly, Langley felt the need to tell a story about Hollywood that *The Wizard of Oz* could not.

One chapter of *Hocus Pocus* particularly spells out Langley’s firsthand frustration as a screenwriter. Putting Pearl’s first-person voice on hold to interject his own, he writes, “Nobody in pictures likes writers ... and the writers don’t like anybody in pictures” (98). Later, he continues: “[A] writer can’t be given official credit on a picture unless he’s contributed twenty-five per cent of the script, so these dummies are kept on ice right along to the last minute, and then let loose on the script ... [B]y the time they’re through it reads like something thrown out by a burlesque house, but they’ve got their legal twenty-five per cent” (102-3).

The Wizard of Oz premiered at Grauman’s Chinese Theater on August 15, 1939. Langley, not invited to the event, reportedly watched a daytime screening shortly

thereafter and, in his words, “cried like a bloody child. I thought, ‘This is a year of my life.’ I loathed the picture. I thought it was dead. . . . I had to wait for my tears to clear before I went out of the theater” (qtd. in Harnetz 59). With his name prominently attached to the final product, Langley nevertheless felt alienated from the flickering technicolor fantasy he watched that day on Hollywood Boulevard. On the one hand, as I have suggested, *Oz* offers an allegorical critique of the film industry under the guise of fantasy, but on the other hand, the studio system continued to enact its dominance over those who spoke against it. The fact that few have ever heard of *Hocus Pocus*, a novel written by a screenwriter of (and published only a couple years after) one of the most popular Hollywood films of all time, demonstrates how popular film, with all its technological capacity for sensorial immersion, continued to eclipse Hollywood fiction. If three-strip technicolor, as Natalie Kalmus claimed, marked the final conquest of capturing the real world on film, and if Hollywood fiction inherently claimed a more authentic representation of the film industry than what viewers could find in theaters or in fan magazines, how could the disruptive voices of Hollywood fiction continue to speak without being silenced by popular film?

On their way back to Los Angeles from Mexico in December of 1940, a year and a half after the release of *The Day of the Locust*, West and his wife Eileen died in a car accident soon after crossing the U.S. border. The tragedy concluded a year’s worth of disappointment for West over the novel’s reception. According to its publisher Random House, *Locust* had sold less than 1,500 copies in the first seven months. Though West had hoped the novel’s sales would free him from the financial dependency and relatively

mindless labor of screenwriting, its commercial failure prompted the thirty-seven year old to continue writing for the movies. “The book is what the publisher, at least, calls a definite flop,” he wrote to Edmund Wilson, “Right there is the whole reason why I have to continue working in Hollywood” (qtd. in Bercovitch 796).

Raymond Chandler, on the other hand, saw much more success with the release of *The Big Sleep* in February of 1939. Published by Knopf, which had also released Raoul Whitfield’s *Death in a Bowl* a decade prior, *The Big Sleep* sold 18,000 copies in U.S. and Britain. One particularly prophetic *Los Angeles Times* columnist opened his review of the book by noting its cinematic latency: “Humphrey Bogart’s first starring vehicle is here, readymade” (“James M. Cain”). Although not exactly up to par commercially with the work of fellow hard-boiled novelists James Cain and Dashiell Hammett, *The Big Sleep* drew considerably more attention than *Locust* and set forth a string of events that would eventually lead to Chandler’s invitation to write for Paramount. Unlike West who viewed screenwriting as a means to an end, Chandler thought of Hollywood as a chance to capitalize on his writing, a skill that had hardly made ends meet in pulp magazines and other outlets. West envisioned *The Day of the Locust* as his ticket out of Hollywood, but *The Big Sleep* set the wheels in motion that would lead to Chandler’s invitation into the film industry.

“You Befouled Your Own Nest”:

Film Noir, *Sunset Boulevard*, and the Eclipse of Hollywood Fiction

The whole book is a suicide note. It is not tragic, not bitter,
not even pessimistic. It simply washes its hands of life...

—Raymond Chandler on *The Day of the Locust*, 1949

I.

Soon after the release of Howard Hawks’s film adaptation of *The Big Sleep* in 1946, Raymond Chandler wrote a column for the *Atlantic Monthly* in anticipation of the year’s Oscar ceremony. In it, he observed that “[i]n a novel you can still say what you like, ... but the motion picture made in Hollywood, if it is to create art at all, must do so within such strangling limitations of subject and treatment that it is a blind wonder it ever achieves any distinction beyond the purely mechanical slickness of a glass and chromium bathroom” (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler Papers* 72). It is interesting that he should voice such a passé outlook on the industry given that two years earlier he worked with Billy Wilder, one of the studio system’s most subversive directors, to co-write *Double Indemnity* (1944), one of the most groundbreaking works of film noir. Perhaps more reflective of his general bitterness from a curtailed stint in Hollywood, Chandler’s statement neglects to account for the substantial shifts the industry had been facing for most of the decade.

The generations of Hollywood fiction I have discussed thus far, in addition to drawing from earlier literary and cinematic representations of the industry, shared the common denominator of understanding the Hays Office and film technology as

oppressive forces working in tandem to silence disruptive voices. Chapters 1 and 2 examined how the novels of the 1920s and early 1930s took their cue from a combination of Will Hays's public relations efforts and the various exclusions prompted or heightened by film technologies, while Chapter 3 went on to argue that the novels of the late 1930s depicted a Hollywood landscape that had become aesthetically inseparable from technicolor film yet void of Hollywood's moral code under the Production Code Administration (PCA). This final chapter begins with the assertion that film noir, aesthetically and politically working to circumvent—while paradoxically relying upon—film technologies and the Production Code, inherits the tradition of Hollywood fiction that continually carved a place for itself within the technological and political limits of the industry. *The Wizard of Oz* may have articulated an allegorical critique of Hollywood through its play on technicolor, but its happy ending back in Kansas ultimately reduced the film as a palatable commercial product sold in Disneyfied shrink wrap.⁷³ I will argue that Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* (1950), perhaps the most famous Hollywood-on-Hollywood film, takes its cue from the three generations of Hollywood fiction I have attempted to tease out in this dissertation—from the silenced extra girl, to the emasculated male screenwriter-turned-detective, and finally to the technicolored simulacrum of Southern California. To preface my larger discussion of *Sunset Boulevard*, I will look to earlier films such as *Double Indemnity* and *Detour* to trace how noir's representation of Hollywood evolved out of Hollywood fiction.

⁷³ As I explain in at the end of the previous chapter, several reviewers of *The Wizard of Oz* compared the film and its color to Disney's *Snow White*.

In 1972 Paul Schrader articulated what would become a foundational definition of film noir, calling it a period of Hollywood film in the 1940s and 1950s that “portrayed the world of dark, slick city streets, crime and corruption” (8). The postwar years, Schrader explains, generated audiences who felt unsatisfied with “the same studio streets they had been watching for a dozen years” (Schrader 10). For Schrader, noir came about for a few key reasons: the widespread disillusion brought on by WWII, postwar realism (which integrated exterior and on-location shots), the German influence (the chiascuro lighting onto realistic settings), and the 1930s hard-boiled literary tradition made commercially visible by such authors as Chandler and Hammett. In *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (1985), David Bordwell has described noir in terms of its “patterns of nonconformity” that “challenge the neutrality and ‘invisibility’ of classical style,” perhaps most notably “[a]n attack on the motivated happy ending” (75-76). In a similar vein, J.P. Tellote, in his book *Voices in the Dark* (1989), considered film noir as a violation of the “classical film narrative” commonly made up of “objective point of view,” “cause-effect logic,” “goal-oriented characters” and “progression toward narrative closure” (2-3). For Tellote, in its rupture of cinematic convention, film noir more broadly functioned “as a response or resistance to the dominations of power in society” (12).

Other scholars have looked more specifically to noir’s relationship with the Hays Office’s Production Code. In their foundational study of noir, *A Panorama of American Film Noir* (1955), French critics Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton insisted that censorship in part gave birth to the noir aesthetic. Unlike a novel that “c[ould] go much further in the gratuitousness” and depict sexuality “more freely,” for instance, “cinema

has had to proceed by allusion more than by direct description” (16-17). For them, “[c]ensorship has had a paradoxical effect: where sensuality is concerned, the implied meaning can only add to the turbid atmosphere, to the images’ power of suggestion” (17). With Joseph Breen still at the helm of the Hays Office, as James Naremore similarly asserts, “[noir] directors learned the art of omission” (99). A classic example of censorship’s aesthetic benefits occurs in *Double Indemnity* when, instead of showing Walter Neff murdering Barbara Stanwyck’s husband in the backseat of the car, the camera remains in a close-up on Stanwyck’s face behind the wheel, giving more focus to her character’s disturbing psychological disposition than the physical violence just off screen. On the post-studio and post-censorship era, Billy Wilder once commented, “There are times when I wish we had censorship, because the fun has gone out of it, the game that you played with them” (qtd. in Staggs 34).

Given the plethora of scholarship dealing with film noir’s attention to and inversion of classical Hollywood cinema, it is interesting that noir’s roots in Hollywood fiction have gone largely ignored. While scholars commonly credit the hard-boiled fiction of Chandler and Hammett as part of film noir’s emergence,⁷⁴ their discussion tends to ignore Chandler’s literary predecessors and the ongoing struggle to voice a critique of an industry. Keeping in mind that the novels discussed in previous chapters aimed to provide their respective readerships a perspective of film culture unavailable in other outlets, film

⁷⁴ For instance, Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton’s 1955 study includes a chapter, “The Sources of Film Noir,” whose opening sentence reads: “The immediate source of film noir is obviously the hard-boiled detective novel of American or English origin. Dashiell Hammett, whose earliest writings go back to around 1925, is both the creator of this new American literary current ... [Chandler] is nevertheless the group’s most important author” (15).

noir of the 1940s signals a moment when a handful of writers and directors responded to the industry's technological abundance by engaging with the residual excess of the studio system, from its soundstages to its technicolor optimism. While the Hollywood novel filled in what the Hays Office widely left out, film noir pushed the onscreen envelope to expand what the Hays Office would allow. Therefore, I will further argue that the period of film noir marks the beginning of a time when the Hollywood novel becomes immaterial both literally and figuratively, as writer Joe Gillis's disembodied voice-over narration in *Sunset Boulevard* exemplifies. If the industry could now provide a visually immersive and grim behind-the-scenes look at the industry, what cultural demand did the Hollywood novel have? Without the political limits of film production, to what extent might the Hollywood novel have devolved a toothless literary genre?

One might argue that all film noir, because of its dark visual style and bleak narrative content, always challenges the conventions of Hollywood cinema regardless of its setting, but here I want to give particular focus to those that interrogate Hollywood as a place within their narrative. Los Angeles noir, what Mike Davis has called an "unmasking" of Southern California's booster spectacle (18), signifies a particular kind of noir that depicts a side of "Hollywood" outside studio gates and beyond tourist attractions. In his book *Hollywood Cinema and the Real Los Angeles*, Mark Shiel argues that noir's on-location filming in the Los Angeles area was central to the visual unmasking of the region's boosterism. Although many films preceding the rise of noir diegetically set themselves in or around Los Angeles, Shiel explains, it was not until the 1940s that films relied less on soundstages and more on the actual city. In particular,

Shiel points out, on-location night shoots in and around Los Angeles heightened film noir's antibooster implications by inverting the "beautiful landscape, sunshine and opportunity ... into darkness, perversion and corruption" (222). On-location filming also elicited what David Bordwell has described as a "realist aesthetic" of film noir beginning in the 1940s (475). Billy Wilder, for instance, recognized the artistic potential in using the real city to counter its promotional image. In a 1976 interview, he stated that he shot "*Double Indemnity* ... on location to get away from the Hollywood lot. ... I strove for a stronger sense of realism in the settings in order to match the kind of story we were telling. I wanted to get away from what we described in those days as the white satin decor associated with MGM's chief set designer" (qtd. in Phillips xii).

To add to Shiel's study, I view Los Angeles noir's unmasking of Southern California boosterism happening on two levels, the first of which is reflected in noir's frequent lack of technicolor. As I argue in Chapter 3, three-strip technicolor in the 1930s borrowed iconography from Southern California boosterism, but 1940s noir used black-and-white cinematography as a tool to wipe the paint off, so to speak.⁷⁵ Schrader describes the incursion of color film in the 1950s as "the final blow to the *noir* look" (12; emphasis in original), but from its inception film noir more accurately responded to the popularity of technicolor by distancing itself from it. Both *Sunset Boulevard* and *In a*

⁷⁵ The difference between a film like *A Star is Born* and one like *Double Indemnity*, at least in terms of setting, lies in the fact that the former ultimately participates in the colorful booster promotion. *A Star is Born* (1937)—a film curiously absent from Shiel's study—admittedly integrates actual locations, but they tend to include only the "booster" highlights, among them Grauman's Chinese Theater, the Hollywood Bowl, and the Santa Anita race track. Even Norman Maine's suicide scene off the coast of Malibu takes advantage of the beach sunset to showcase technicolor's ability.

Lonely Place, for instance, draw explicit attention to technicolor to stress a self-awareness of their own black-and-white worlds and drab depiction of Hollywood. When former starlet Norma Desmond first meets screenwriter Joe Gillis, she exclaims, “You’ve made a rope of words and strangled this business! But there’s a microphone right there to catch the last gurgles, and technicolor to photograph the red, swollen tongues!” Likewise, as Mildred Atkinson describes the romance the studio wants Dix Steele to adapt, she interrupts her own retelling of the plot to say, “I do hope it’s gonna be in technicolor!” The disruption of technicolor frames the narrative content that undoes the booster myth of health and happiness. Similar to Tod’s “Burning of Los Angeles” made up entirely of the figures left out of popular representations of Southern California, these films trade in boosterism’s foreground for the background.

The second form of unmasking in Los Angeles noir occurs through its conscious omission of tourist locations. The landscape viewers experience in these films differs from the rigidly structured visit of the young movie aspirants from Octavus Ray Cohen’s novel I discuss briefly in Chapter 2, for instance. While Los Angeles noir largely consigned the film industry to the background as a conscious attempt to go behind the city’s tourist fronts, such an exclusion also ensured that the Hays Office—which was born out of the need to clean up Hollywood’s moral image—would not immediately reject it on tradition and principle. It is important to remember that Hays’s public relations branch sprang from the same political agenda as his list of “Don’ts and Be Carefuls” for filmmakers, an early version of the Production Code. Following the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle scandal in 1921, as I discuss in the introduction, Hays encouraged

filmmakers to produce films that depicted Hollywood as a friendly and communal place, similar to the promotional gesture of studio grand openings in the 1910s. In this respect, portraying the streets of Hollywood negatively was just as politically taboo as breaking the rules listed in the Code. Still, in spite of its narrative distance from the industry, Los Angeles noir of the 1940s helped pave the way for mainstream films that would look more directly at the film industry in the years to come.⁷⁶

Some of the final traces of Hays's public relations efforts from the 1920s can be seen in Joseph Breen's review for the B-film noir *Detour* (1945), an adaptation of Martin Goldsmith's 1939 novel. Notably released the same year as *The Day of the Locust* and *The Big Sleep*, Goldsmith's novel includes a scathing depiction of Hollywood that would have made it unadaptable a decade earlier. In it, Goldsmith alternates between two first person narrators, Alexander Roth and Sue Harvey. Alexander, a twenty-nine year old musician from New York, travels to Hollywood to seek stardom and to reunite with Sue, his girlfriend who has already been in Hollywood for some time trying to achieve stardom.

⁷⁶ Other than showing Hollywood Boulevard in the distance when Neff drives to Phyllis Dietrichson's house in the foothills in *Double Indemnity* (1944), for instance, the film playfully flirts with the integration of a Hollywood attractions when Neff and Lola visit the Hollywood Bowl (a scene absent from James Cain's original novel); but even then they watch from in the hills, not in the box seats where Norman Maine sits in *A Star is Born*. It is also significant in this scene that the film—which otherwise puts so much emphasis on location shooting—reverts to a soundstage made up of an artificial hill and a “transparency” backdrop of the Bowl. This decision more than likely had to do with the difficulty in capturing a clear image of the Bowl from such a distance at night, not to mention the potential noise a Bowl performance would pick up. More important, the pre-filmed backdrop works to reinstate the fictive quality of these tourist locations. In fact, even drafts of the pre-production script lists this shot as a transparency.

In their respective narrations, neither Alexander nor Sue has positive things to say about the industry. Alex, for instance, tells readers that his misshapen nose “shouldn’t prove a handicap. I understand they can hook enough filters, portrait-attachments and jiggers to the camera to make Madame X look like Shirley Temple” (38-39). Sue, moreover, echoes Nathanael West in her description of the social layout of the city:

I soon saw that there were only two classes of society [in Hollywood]: the suckers, like myself, who had come to take the town; and the slickers who had come to take the suckers. Both groups were plotters and schemers and both on the verge of starvation. There was also a third group which I’d heard and read about but never seemed to come in contact with: those who were actually under contract. From what I understood, these fortunates barricade themselves in their magnificent Beverly Hills or Bel-Air estates for fear someone might want to borrow a dollar. (82)

Sue’s observations solidify what *Locust* implies: The industry elites, in their “impregnable fortresses” (Goldsmith 230), have abandoned the actual streets of Hollywood and in their wake have left a morally unregulated space. Those visiting Hollywood Boulevard with all its flashing neon Coca-Cola signs (185) are greeted by extras like Raoul Kildare, whom Sue describes as “Hollywood personified . . . There were thousands like him in town, each one trying terribly hard to be different, each one a Greek god, walking around and spilling glamour all over the streets for the benefit of tourists” (81). Comparing the landscape to a soundstage, Sue describes the area as “not exactly a musical-comedy setting” because of the common “rain and fog” (91). Such

images stress the extent to which the industry no longer concerned itself with the promotional façade so prevalent only a decade earlier. The streets of Hollywood have turned into their own self-regulating system made up of movie aspirants taking satisfaction in the attention of movie tourists.

On his way to Hollywood, Alexander accepts a ride from a wealthy marijuana addict, Mr. Haskel, who mysteriously dies in the passenger seat of the car. Alexander takes Haskel's car and adopts his identity in the hopes of obtaining his family fortune, which eventually leads to Haskel's former lover, Vera, discovering his scheme before threatening to blackmail him. Explicitly criticizing the Hays Office, Alexander at one point thinks,

If this were a movie, I would fall in love with Vera, marry her and make a decent woman of her. Or else she'd make some supreme Class A sacrifice for me and die, leaving me free to marry Sue. She would experience a complete and totally unwarranted change of heart, wipe out her sins by dramatic death, pleasing me, the Hays office and the morons in the mezzanine. ... You know, it would be a great thing if our lives could be arranged like a movie plot. M.G.M does a much better job of running humanity than God. On the screen the good people always come out all right in the end. (199)

By coupling the Hays Office with "morons in the mezzanine," the passage implies that the moral standard of Hollywood caters not to working toward a wholesome world but to

controlling a mindless mass. Further, the novel continues to draw a distinction between Hollywood film and Hollywood as a place (“If this were a movie”).

It is unclear whether Breen read the original novel since the production notes for the film version of *Detour* only indicate his reading of the Goldsmith’s self-adapted screenplay. Two days after the studio submitted a treatment to the PCA, Breen responded with the typical feedback, including the idea that the film should end with Alex “in the hands of the police” (MPAA). Still, Breen’s most interesting point of concern comes at the end of his letter where he writes, “If you decide to lay this story in Hollywood, it is important that ... Actor Raoul be so characterized as not to reflect discredit on the Motion Picture Industry” (MPAA). Although minor, and perhaps significantly so, this note for *Detour* signifies one of the last breaths of Will Hays’s original mission in 1920s Hollywood. No such note, for instance, exists in the PCA’s review of *Sunset Boulevard* or *In a Lonely Place*, released only five years later, despite the fact that both films deal much more directly with the industry and, in so doing, regularly “discredit” it.

II.

While WWII expedited the emergence of film noir on screen, as Paul Schrader and others have noted, it also changed Los Angeles’s physical and social landscape off screen. Sheri Biesen explains that studios provided limited funds for set building in an effort to practice wartime rationing, prompting many filmmakers to take more advantage of locations in favor of recycled studio sets (*Blackout 72*). Wartime regulated blackouts punctuated noir’s dark imagery by making the cityscape even darker, while the war itself

gave way to the kind of camera technologies that made night filming more feasible (*Blackout* 6). WWII also impacted studio employment as several of the industry's men had enlisted in the military, a shift that granted more creative license to German émigré directors like Billy Wilder (*Blackout* 6). Since male screenwriters were also among those who put their careers on hold to serve in the war, as Frank Krutnik notes, the industry looked to other available sources for screenplays in addition to those who penned them. In November 1943, *Variety* magazine reported that the “[s]hortage of story materials and writers now has film companies seriously ogling the pulp mag scripts and scripters” (qtd. in Krutnik 37). Since Raymond Chandler was too old to enlist in service, he fit the job description perfectly.

Upon his arrival at Paramount in 1943, having published three more Marlowe novels, Chandler went to work on co-writing his first screenplay based on James Cain's 1935 novel *Double Indemnity*. Film historians commonly consider the adaptation of *Double Indemnity* one of the most influential manifestations of noir. Schrader, glorifying its screenplay as “the best written and most characteristically *noir* of the period” (10; emphasis in original), has argued that *Double Indemnity* signified a break from the “romantic film noirs,” among them Hawks's film adaptation of *The Big Sleep* and Michael Curtiz's 1945 adaptation of *Mildred Pierce*. J.P. Tellote credits *Double Indemnity* with “establishing a formula that other films would follow” (42). To continue tracing the historical links between Hollywood fiction and film noir, I want to examine in this section how Raymond Chandler drew inspiration from *The Big Sleep* during his

involvement with *Double Indemnity*. Thanks to Chandler's influence, *Double Indemnity* would provide a stepping stone to the production of *Sunset Boulevard* a few years later.

Meeting Chandler, Wilder "was very surprised. I had imagined, after reading *The Big Sleep*, a kind of Philip Marlowe. ... But [Chandler] was an awkward, pale, elderly man, who made a somewhat strange impression" (Meyers x). If Chandler failed to match his literary counterpart in person, he certainly brought the literary essence of *The Big Sleep* to his work on *Double Indemnity*. In spite of Cain's novel taking place around 1935, Chandler—writing in 1943—almost instinctively returned to the tried-and-true setting of *The Big Sleep* in his initial outline:

The year is 1939. Early fall. Night.

Los Angeles at night, very late. A sky heavy with stars. The wide sweep of the city, the foothills, the flat distances to the south. The sounds and sights of the city, the late ever restless traffic.

Tall buildings near Wilshire and La Brea, with a few scattered lighted windows where the cleaning staff is still at work. Down on the sidewalk a cocktail bar closes, the last customers come out, drive away, voices dying on the night, silence, the light goes out behind a glass brick front. (Billy Wilder papers)

The 1939 temporal mark, the fall season, and the haunting foothills set against the urban space loosely resemble the opening images of *The Big Sleep*, which read: "It was about eleven o'clock in the morning, mid October, with the sun not shining and the look of hard wet rain in the clearness of the foothills" (3).

The literary ghost of Marlowe, who “[l]ives at the Hobart Arms on Franklin” in *The Big Sleep* (74), can also be seen in Chandler’s early description of Walter Neff’s apartment: “The same evening, an hour or so later. Exterior of an apartment house north of Franklin Avenue (or anywhere)” (Billy Wilder papers). Although seemingly insignificant, Wilder changed Walter’s apartment location to “LOS OLIVOS APARTMENTS. It is a six story building in the Normandie-Wilshire district with a basement garage” (Billy Wilder papers). During filming, however, Wilder ended up using an actual apartment building between Franklin and Hollywood for exterior shots. What these pre-production details articulate is that the film version of *Double Indemnity* inherited subtle yet significant strains of Chandler’s novel, perhaps more representative of *The Big Sleep* than the Howard Hawks film adaptation from 1946. David Thomson, for instance, has opined that the lack of on-location filming in Hawks’s adaptation of *The Big Sleep* took away from its aesthetic credibility: “It is an interior film, without sunlight, fresh air or real nature. ... [The soundstage sets] are formal, orderly, enclosing, and dictated by the specially designed sets” (9-10).⁷⁷

As Biesen has helped document, James Cain’s original novel had an elongated journey from book publication to screen adaptation, a trajectory worth revisiting briefly here. In 1935, MGM’s censorship office sent Joseph Breen a copy of *Double Indemnity*, requesting that he respond to the material “at the earliest possible date” so that the studio

⁷⁷ Regarding the Realito scenes in particular, Thomson continues to lament what he evidently sees as the film’s lost aesthetic potential: “[I]t’s all a set, a moody gesture towards the little town Chandler dreamed up in orange grove country” (11). Paul Schrader likewise describes the soundstage sets used in *The Big Sleep* as “polite and conventional in contrast to their later, more realistic counterparts” (10).

would know “whether we will be able to [film] it as it stands or whether you could suggest any changes that would make it possible to get past the censors with it” (MPAA). Not surprisingly, the narrative content made up of murder, adultery, and disregard for legal authority seemed to Breen completely antithetical to the Production Code. Only a day after MGM’s request, Breen—addressing his response to Louis B. Mayer specifically—exclaimed, “It is our considered judgment that the story under discussion is most objectionable and, unless it can be materially changed, both in structure and in detail, all consideration of it for screen purposes should be dismissed” (MPAA).

The possibility of a screen adaptation for *Double Indemnity* remained dormant for nearly a decade before Luigi Luraschi from Paramount again requested Breen’s preliminary report on the novel. In spite of the eight years between rejection letters, Breen reproduced his response nearly verbatim—the only difference being the wording of the letters’ opening sentences (MPAA). But unlike MGM, Paramount evidently refused to give up on the project so easily. Six months later, on September 24th, 1943, Breen approved a draft of the *Double Indemnity* screenplay: “We have read the part script, part outline treatment . . . , and are happy to report the basic story seems to meet the requirements of the Production Code” (MPAA).

A combination of factors might explain why Breen changed his mind so drastically in the window of six months and onward, most of which had to do with the shifting cultural climate prompted by WWII. First, as Thomas Doherty explains, the agenda of the Office of War Information (OWI), an organization in charge of dispersing “wartime propaganda across the civilian media” (Doherty 155), quickly came into

conflict with the finer points of the Code, including the handling of violence and profanity. As Breen unequivocally stated in 1942, “[t]he function of the Production Code is not to be patriotic, it is to be moral” (qtd. in Doherty 158). In spite of his best efforts, however, the OWI had a certain amount of leverage to take matters into their own hands. Projecting documentary newsreels whose “time-sensitive nature” allowed them to skip through the PCA and go directly to theaters (Doherty 162), the OWI’s newsreels exposed “a shocking contrast to the soundstage images vetted by the Breen Office” (Doherty 162). For the first time on an American movie screen, audiences witnessed real images of carnage and senseless death. In 1944, the OWI began to criticize publicly motion picture censorship for its “silk glove treatment of the Nazis, Fascists, and the Japs,” a statement which Doherty suggests partly prompted the Hays Office “to move its goalposts” to reflect the country’s shifting moral climate (163).

Aside from the wartime politics on screen, one of the most important factors that contributed to Breen’s change of heart came from Chandler. Chandler stepped aboard the project in between Breen’s rejection and acceptance after Wilder’s usual writing partner, Charles Brackett—who would go on to co-write *Sunset Boulevard* with Wilder—found Cain’s novel “grisly and disgusting” (ix). “[A]lways irritated ... to be compared with Cain,” as he once confided to a friend (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler* 39), Chandler found Cain’s original dialogue from the novel unsuitable for the screen, a view he openly shared with Cain following his work on the *Double Indemnity* adaptation:

A curious matter I’d like to call to your attention ... is your dialogue.

Nothing could be more natural and easy and to the point on the paper, and

yet it doesn't quite play. ... On the screen [it] is all lost, and the essential mildness of the phrasing shows up as lacking sharpness. They tell me that is the difference between photographic dialogue and written dialogue. For the screen everything has to be sharpened and pointed and wherever possible elided. (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler*, 41)

Perhaps of more literary significance than historical, Chandler's move to adapt Cain's story into what Biesen calls "Chandleresque voice-over narration" in flashback proved a successful compromise for the Hays Office ("Censorship" 47). Unlike the novel, the film famously begins with Walter speaking his confession into a Dictaphone, which then becomes the voice-over narration of his flashback. Neff's retrospective narration "simulate[d] a voice of morality," putting "the criminal up front ... to emphasize the futility of the perpetrator's immoral deeds" (Biesen, "Censorship" 47). The film's voice-over, which Chandler had cleverly devised from the very beginning, provided a redeeming moral quality in line with the Production Code. To Breen's satisfaction, viewers would know from the beginning that Walter would face punishment for his crimes. In addition to the voice-over narration, Chandler's biographer Tom Hiney credits Chandler with having come up with the film's "double-entendre banter" that replaced "[t]he carnality of Cain's novel" and would later prove to be a generic staple of noir (*Raymond Chandler*, 142). The film gives nod to Chandler's narrative influence by giving Chandler himself a cameo. In an early scene when Walter leaves Keyes's office and walks by Chandler sitting in the hallway reading a book, Chandler looks up from his book and stares at him intently, contrasting the other men passing Walter who ignore

him. Walter's voice-over resumes moments later as Chandler continues to stare, as though Chandler's observations of him in the present parallel Walter's observations of himself in hindsight.

As his cameo makes clear, Chandler's presence in the film was not limited to the words on the page. According to biographer Gene Phillips, Chandler contributed to *Double Indemnity's* filming locations, "conscientiously [doing] fieldwork while working on the screenplay by visiting various locations that figured in the film [and] taking coping notes all the while" (170). The inclusion of the famous Jerry's Market in the film, for instance, came from Chandler's extra circular scouting.⁷⁸ Located directly across from the Paramount lot on Melrose Avenue in 1943, though no longer standing, Jerry's Market provides the rendezvous point for Phyllis and Walter who disguise themselves as everyday consumers while quietly discussing the details of their scheme. Jerry's Market in this scene also calls to mind the SunGold Market where Homer Simpson goes in *The Day of the Locust*, "a large brilliantly lit place" with the "canned goods department" beyond the fruits in "the showcases" (87-88). The second time Walter and Phyllis meet, the camera, situated inside the market, shows Phyllis on the other side of the window getting out her car and walking toward the store. In the foreground of the shot, fruit products line the window from the inside, the lemons situated closest to the camera. As Phyllis walks closer to the window (and the camera), a white man in a suit walks across the shot behind Phyllis and stares intently at the fruit as if to highlight their spectacle not

⁷⁸ According to Sheri Biesen, the on-location filming at Jerry's Market was highly regulated with detectives and Office Price Administration officials "patrol[ing] the shoot ... to prevent theft by the cast and crew of grocery items during production due to wartime rationing" ("Censorship" 48).

readily apparent in the black-and-white cinematography. Beyond the fruit display in the back of the store, where Walter and Phyllis rendezvous, are the mass packaged foods, most notably canned foods stacked in pyramids against the store walls. Film scholar Eric Dussere has recently remarked that the film's use of the market signals a crucial moment in the history of noir, highlighting noir's opposition to the "mass-produced emptiness . . . Hollywood typically produces" (34). In this way, Chandler's eye for representing the city's fabric effectively adapted the sentiment of Hollywood fiction on film.

While the final product of the film was a success, Chandler and Wilder famously did not get along during the writing process. At one point Chandler wrote a letter to Paramount outlining his amusing demands if he were to finish the script, including that Wilder stop pointing his cane at him (Phillips 169). The two would never work together again, yet *Double Indemnity* represents Chandler's passing of the literary torch to Wilder. *Sunset Boulevard*, for instance, inherits *Double Indemnity*'s technique of flashback voice-over narration as a kind of moral loophole. Where *Double Indemnity* opens with Walter Neff essentially turning himself in, *Sunset Boulevard* begins with Joe Gillis already dead. In May of 1949, Breen wrote to Paramount's censorship department expressing concern over the addition of the "sex affair between Gillis and Norma which was not present in the earlier material" (MPAA). Now recognizing the Chandler flashback convention, Breen wrote, "We are quite aware that the story is told in flashback and the leading man is shown to be dead when the story opens," but "it seems to us that there is no indication of a voice for morality by which the sex affair would be condemned nor does there appear to be compensating moral values for the sin" (MPAA).

Following the *Double Indemnity* debacle, Billy Wilder's next serious film, *The Lost Weekend* (1945), continued to create a headache for the Hays Office. Famous radio personality Jimmie Fidler, whose broadcast was brought to Breen's attention the next day, reported that "Paramount Studio, after paying \$100,000 for screen rights to the novel 'The Lost Week-End,' must scrap the valuable property and re-write the story. The Will Hays Office has banned it because the plot concerns a man who spends a drunken weekend" (MPAA). Although more than likely an exaggeration since Breen began reviewing drafts of the script the following month, the fact that the Hays Office's operations had become newsworthy knowledge reflects a cultural shift, as though the public began to focus on the man behind the curtain in favor of his cinematic projection.⁷⁹

III.

If the industry's need for a moral façade on and off screen served as the institutional foundation of the Production Code, the release of *Sunset Boulevard* demonstrates how far removed the early concerns over the industry's self-promotion had

⁷⁹ The same year, Eric Johnston, former head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, replaced Will Hays as the head of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America and soon thereafter changed its name simply to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA, the rating system still in effect today). In addition to the political and cultural shifts prompted by the war, Johnston's arrival further contributed to the waning grasp of the Production Code. Johnston received letters of complaint almost immediately after taking on the position that doubted his ability to regulate motion picture content the ways Hays did. Following the release of the film version of *The Big Sleep* in 1946, for instance, Amelie Ripley Pumpelly, a member of the Woman's Republican Club, wrote, "How do you explain your office white washing such a dirty picture for release all over our country? Have you seen it? We feel strongly about it, and because we admire you we hate to hear people all around here saying that the Hays Office would never have passed it, and that your office could not have passed it if you had not yielded to powerful pressure from the studio which produced it" (MPAA office files). Aside from Pumpelly's relatively antiquated line of questioning, her suggestion that the studios could feasibly assert "powerful pressure" to have films pass through the censors is not unfounded.

become. Keeping in mind that the earliest attempts at self-regulation centered on the need for studios and their stars to sustain a wholesome image, Breen's moral code, to the extent that he could still enforce it, now only vaguely resonated with Hays's morality clauses. Ultimately approved by the PCA, *Sunset Boulevard* hardly met the approval of studio heads.⁸⁰ After a private screening of the film on the Paramount lot, Louis B. Mayer reportedly confronted Billy Wilder in the theater lobby, yelling, "You befouled your own nest. You should be kicked out of this country, tarred and feathered, goddamn foreigner son of a bitch" (qtd. in Staggs 164). Later he demanded that the industry "horsewhip this Wilder! We should throw him out of this town! ... He has brought disgrace on the town that is feeding him!" (qtd. in Meyers xv).⁸¹

Here I argue that *Sunset Boulevard* combines the tropes of film noir with those of Hollywood fiction to penetrate Breen's fully imagined world of technicolor consciousness on screen.⁸² While *Double Indemnity* and other Los Angeles noir of the

⁸⁰ A slightly less extreme indication of the political discrepancy between moguls like Mayer and the PCA can be located in a cut sequence from *Sunset Boulevard*. A song entitled "The Paramount-Don't-Want-Me Blues," which apparently Joe would have sang, song consists of a playful diatribe of all the major studios: "I got those Paramount-don't-want-me / Warner Brothers-only-taunt-me / And-the-others-seem-to-flaunt-me blues. I got those, 'So-I-said-to-Zanuck / Metro-thinks-that-I'm-titanic / Back-in-Butte-I-was-a-panic,' blues" (MPAA). Breen approved the lyrics to the song two days after submission.

⁸¹ Of all the moguls, Mayer was particularly vocal in his disgust over those who capitalized on unflattering depictions of the industry while still cashing paychecks that bore its signature. In addition to the episode with Noel Langley's *Hocus Pocus*, Mayer detested Budd Schulberg's novel *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941), "one of the all-time best-sellers in American publishing history" (Starr, *Dream Endures* 314). According to Kevin Starr, Mayer called for Schulberg's deportation after reading the novel, similar to his reaction after viewing *Sunset Boulevard*.

⁸² This dismissal of technicolor is apparent when Norma visits Cecil B. DeMille on the Paramount lot where DeMille is in the process of filming *Samson and Delilah* (1949), an actual movie famously filmed in technicolor. The black and white portrayal of *Samson and Delilah*'s movie set in *Sunset Boulevard* quite literally offers viewers a different perspective than the

1940s engage with the studio system's residual excess of soundstages and technicolor via black-and-white location shooting,⁸³ *Sunset Boulevard* takes the critique a step further by also integrating the system's leftover literary genres. Norma Desmond and Joe Gillis, as I will show, respectively represent the extra-girl and studio-detective genres that could not adapt to the industry's shifting social and technological landscape.⁸⁴ Further, like the fiction of West and Chandler from Chapter 3, the film exposes the extent to which the Production Code ironically fails to represent that which lies immediately beyond the studio gates. Unlike *The Big Sleep* and *The Day of the Locust*, however, Wilder's film was subjected to the Code and its restrictions. As a result, the moments when *Sunset Boulevard* abides by the Code—the lack of blood or bullet holes on Joe's body when Norma shoots him, for instance—become painfully out of place, counterpointing the kinds of moments the Hays Office never thought to forbid in the first place—including the oddly grotesque image of Norma's dead chimpanzee at the beginning of the film. In this way, the film reduces the Code to a naïve lens through which to view the world.

technicolor shown onscreen a year earlier, aligning the lack of technicolor with the film's behind-the-camera sentiment.

⁸³ *Sunset Boulevard* continues the trend of the film noir before it by showcasing the backside of the industry's promotional front and the characters who occupy it. Artie Green's work as an assistant director, for instance, demands coordinating "background action." Unlike *A Star is Born*, characters in *Sunset Boulevard* merely allude to such tourist attractions as Grauman's Chinese Theater. When Norma tries to kick Joe out of her house after mistaking him for the undertaker, he quips in a Marlowesque way, "Next time I'll bring my autograph album along, or maybe a hunk of cement and ask for your footprints." Perhaps the closest the film comes to showing a "popular" spot is Schwab's drugstore on Sunset Boulevard, but even then Joe describes it as a place where those lower on the industry hierarchy congregate, "a combination office, Kaffee-Klatsch and waiting room. Waiting, waiting for the gravy train." In this respect, *Sunset Boulevard* focuses on the parts of film culture strategically left out the picture.

⁸⁴ The film references the emergence of television broadcasting, for instance, when Norma, Joe, and Max drive up to the iconic Paramount gates. In the background, on the roof of a single story building just outside the gates, KTLA antennas are prominently displayed at the top right of the screen, puncturing the otherwise open daytime sky.

From the era of silent cinema to the talkies, novelists writing about Hollywood used fiction as a tool to provide what they viewed as a more authentic representation of the industry that had been silenced in other media outlets, including newsprint and film itself. The narrative of *Sunset Boulevard*, likewise privileging its own cinematic medium over the emergence of television, begins with Joe's voice-over promising viewers a perspective unlike any other: "You'll read all about it in the late editions, I'm sure. You'll get it over your radio, and see it on television ... But before you hear it all distorted and blown out of proportion, before those Hollywood columnists get their hands on it, maybe you'd like to hear the facts, *the whole truth*" (emphasis added). The famous shot of Joe floating in the swimming pool shortly thereafter immediately works to fulfill this promise with the camera positioned at the bottom of the pool so that viewers stare up at Gillis's body, contrasting the newspaper photographers who have limited perspective and can only capture the backside of his corpse. The viewer will go on to receive not only a less mediated version of the story, the film suggests, but also one newspapers and television will never get right. It is worth noting that *Double Indemnity* begins in a similar way as Walter speeds through a downtown intersection in the early hours of the morning. Running through the traffic signal, he nearly hits a truck carrying copies of the morning paper. Those who will read the news will remain oblivious to Walter's scandalous story for some time, ostensibly giving the film's viewer privileged and more immediate access.

The drawn out pre-production of *Sunset Boulevard* helps to shed light on its relationship to the Production Code and the studios more generally. According to Sam Staggs's study of the film, Paramount had a good deal of confidence in Wilder-and-

Brackett projects largely because of the financial success of their earlier films. As a result, the two had the privilege of submitting only partial scripts to the studio before beginning production. Paramount reportedly approved the *Sunset Boulevard* project based off a thirty-page snippet. Prior to Wilder and Brackett submitting a final script, Staggs explains, the film had already been “budgeted, cast, and in production before [Paramount or Breen] realized exactly what it was about” (28). In April 1949, Breen responded to a longer, albeit still incomplete, version of the script: “We have read pages 1 through 88 for your proposed production . . . Inasmuch as this material is incomplete, we cannot, of course, render an opinion as to the acceptability of the entire story. However, as far as this material goes, we are happy to report that it seems to meet the provisions of the Production Code” (MPAA). Just over a month later, after reading some small revisions, Breen repeated his concern over its incompleteness: “Inasmuch as we have never read the final sequence for this script, we do not know whether the overall story meets the requirements of the Production Code” (MPAA).

Breen and the rest of the administration evidently felt increasingly powerless over their ability to regulate film content, especially with a major studio producing a film without definitive approval from the PCA. A week later, Breen was informed that Eugene Dougherty, “the veteran Breen officer” (Doherty 172), had recently

reminded [Luigi Luraschi from Paramount] that we had some apprehension as to their story SUNSET BOULEVARD. We have never received a full script, we had have no idea how the story ends and, inasmuch as there seems to be a sex affair indicated as well as a murder,

we have some apprehension as to whether or not the complete script, when we receive it, will be acceptable. Mr. Luraschi stated that he understood quite well our position, our inability to render a decision as to the acceptability of this story, and said he hoped to have the balance of the script by the end of the current week. (MPAA)

Breen had good reason to feel out of the loop. According to Charles Brackett's recently published diaries, on May 23rd—the day before Breen's second letter of inquiry—a rough cut of the film had already been completed. Breen's anxiety over the larger process ironically undermined his power concerning the film's smaller details. In the final version of the film, for instance, Norma Desmond's butler Max mentions that Norma "has been married three times"—a bit of information that Breen explicitly told the filmmakers to delete in his response to the first draft: "Please eliminate the reference to Miss Desmond having been married three times" (MPAA).

Given that Breen ignored the subject of Phyllis's marital past in *Double Indemnity*, his request to delete the line regarding Norma's three marriages indicates that he held Norma to a different standard because of her film stardom, as if belatedly attempting to enforce the morality clause in a supposedly fictitious story. As Mary Pickford's split from actor Owen Moore in 1920 indicated, a young actress getting a divorce constituted a scandal in early Hollywood because it threatened the model of Victorian femininity. Swanson's morals clause with Paramount in the early 1920s stated that if she "[was] charged with adulterous conduct or immoral relations with men other than her husband, and such charges or any of them are published in the public press, the

waiver herein contained shall be null and void and of no force and effect” (qtd. in Swanson 190). Inherently sexist in its language, this section of Swanson’s clause parallels the section of the 1930s Production Code that deals with marriage: “The sanctity of the institution of marriage and the home shall be upheld. ... *Adultery*, sometimes necessary plot material, must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively” (Production Code). In her autobiography, Gloria Swanson recounts how her first divorce in 1923 nearly put an end to her career when her former husband threatened to tell the press that she had committed “adultery with fourteen men” during their marriage (Swanson 186). By keeping the line regarding Norma’s three marriages in *Sunset Boulevard*, Wilder deliberately defied Breen and liberated Gloria Swanson from the kind of double standard Frances Marion and Adela Rogers St. Johns critiqued in their 1920s fiction.⁸⁵

I have already attempted to show how Chandler helped inform Wilder’s subversive approach, but here I want to illuminate *Sunset Boulevard*’s historical ties to past Hollywood fiction. In Chapter 1, I argued that *Minnie Flynn* and *The Skyrocket* ought to be read as a response to the industry’s silencing of such stars as Mabel Normand and Minta Arbuckle following their ties to scandal. Jeffrey Meyers, Gene Phillips, and Leo Braudy have each made the point that the name “Norma Desmond” combines Mabel Normand and William Desmond Taylor, the director whose unsolved murder ultimately put Normand’s career to end. *The Skyrocket*’s readership, however, also recognized

⁸⁵ Hilary Hallett points out that, although both Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks divorced their respective spouses to marry one another, the press focused prominently on Mary Pickford’s divorce from and largely ignored Douglas Fairbanks’s (95).

Gloria Swanson—who similarly started their film careers at Mack Sennett’s studios—as an inspiration for St. Johns’s Sharon Kimm. An early 1930s *Motion Picture* magazine recalls that “[w]hile Mrs. St. Johns would probably deny that her exotic heroine was patterned after anyone in particular, there are still snoops of us who recognized Gloria Swanson in several passages in [*The Skyrocket*]” (94). In 1978 St. Johns wrote, “Gloria Swanson remains *today* the all-time prototype of a movie star” (154; emphasis in original). As anyone who has ever written about *Sunset Boulevard* has noted, Norma Desmond serves as a hyper self-reflexive version of Gloria Swanson herself. Norma regularly references earlier times that parallel Swanson’s own career, including her work as one of Sennett’s bathing beauties when Mabel Normand “was always stepping on [her] feet” during their diving routine. Norma’s mansion is also filled with old photographs and paintings of the real Swanson during her younger years. If such novels as *The Skyrocket* represent the first generation of Hollywood fiction, *Sunset Boulevard* in many ways bookends the genre by returning to where it began.

Although perhaps unfamiliar with certain works of Hollywood fiction, Wilder at the very least knew about the films such fiction inspired. In 1979 he commented on the difficulty in producing what he called “a Hollywood picture ... Actually I know very, very few I like. I loved Selznick’s version of *A Star is Born*. I thought that was just marvelous. I loved the original *What Price Hollywood?* And I kind of liked, if I say so myself, *Sunset Boulevard*” (142). Wilder misspoke here, no doubt meaning to say that he loved the original *A Star is Born* from 1937 that adapted *What Price Hollywood?* from 1932. One can hardly fault Wilder for the confusion given the similarities between the

films, but more importantly, Wilder's tongue-and-cheek praise of his film alongside them suggests that such early films provided a cinematic platform from which his vision of *Sunset Boulevard* sprung.

In addition to reviving the first generation of the Hollywood novel, *Sunset Boulevard* borrows significant elements from *The Day of the Locust* as well. No evidence of a relationship between Nathanael West and Charles Brackett or Billy Wilder readily exists, but their involvement in similar social and professional circles makes a connection difficult to deny. Aside from Wilder's hire onto Columbia's writing staff just as West was leaving it in 1933, Brackett began attending Screen Writers Guild meetings sometime between 1935 and 1936, just as West was becoming more involved in it.⁸⁶ Brackett's diaries include an entry on January 15th, 1936 where he writes, "I went to a Screen Writers Guild meeting, feeling as I always do at those meetings, as though I were getting together with the other kids behind the barn to get up a secret club" (Slide, 70). A union made up of movie writers demanding to receive proper credit for their work on a film, the Screen Writers Guild also entailed copyright protection and, ostensibly, heightened career potential. Since only the later set of writers working on a given film would tend to receive credit, as Richard Fine explains, "the system of granting credits was corrupt and counter-productive in that it insidiously pitted writer against writer" (122). Other writers involved in the Guild include a handful of names briefly mentioned in previous chapters, including Dorothy Parker who wrote a blurb for *The Day of the Locust's* cover. Close friends with Parker, Brackett based the main character of his 1934

⁸⁶ According to biographer Jay Martin, West maintained an active membership as early as 1934 and in 1936 became more involved by "transferr[ing] to active guild membership" (348).

novel *Entirely Surrounded* on her.⁸⁷ Since all three writers—Brackett, Parker, and West—attended the same Guild meetings, Brackett had more than likely read *Locust* well before writing *Sunset Boulevard*. West’s protagonist Tod Hackett even bears a nominal resemblance to Charles Brackett.⁸⁸

Norma may have has historical ties to Sharon Kimm from *The Skyrocket*, but she also bears a likeness to Audrey Jenning from *Locust*. Living in a mansion located on Sunset Boulevard, Audrey Jenning—who the novel notably refers to as “Mrs. Jenning” even though West never introduces readers to a husband—“had been a fairly prominent actress in the days of silent films, but sound made it impossible for her to get work. Instead of becoming an extra or a bit player like many other old stars, she had shown excellent business sense and had opened a callhouse” (73). Chewed up and spit out by the studios, Mrs. Jenning maintains her livelihood by creating a business that runs on the same logic as the studios, namely exploiting young women traveling to Hollywood. Part

⁸⁷ The dedication page for *Entirely Surrounded* reads, “FOR DOROTHY Some caricatures: with love” (Slide 57).

⁸⁸ Another figure worth mentioning here is novelist and screenwriter Horace McCoy, a fellow *Black Mask* writer of Chandler and Raoul Whitfield’s. McCoy, according to West’s biographer, knew West from their meetings at Stanley Rose’s bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard where F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, John Fante, Budd Schulberg, Dashiell Hammett, and others would congregate (Martin 271). Some have speculated that McCoy’s 1938 Hollywood novel *I Should Have Stayed Home* influenced the basic plot of *Sunset Boulevard*. Sarah Gleeson-White has written that the novel’s depiction of a young male screenwriter and an older wealthy woman “surely presages” the relationship between Joe Gillis and Norma Desmond (150). But Brackett’s diaries indicate a more direct relationship between Wilder and McCoy. During post-production of *Sunset Boulevard* in October 1949, Brackett writes of Wilder “work[ing] with McCoy on the second floor” of their office building at Paramount (386). Brackett’s entries neglect to clarify whether McCoy contributed to *Sunset Boulevard* or another one of Wilder’s projects, but in any event the following month Wilder “fired Horace McCoy and acquired a young radio writer to work on his story” (388). Not surprisingly, McCoy received no credit for whatever work he had done for Wilder.

of her success has to do with her method of collecting “fifty per cent” of her employee’s earnings (West 73). Adapting the model of Central Casting that centralized employment for extras, Mrs. Jennings “maintain[s] a beautiful house for the girls to wait in and a car and a chauffeur to deliver them to their clients” (West 73).

Mrs. Jennings’s mansion, like Norma’s, even has a personal “silver screen, the kind that rolls up” (73), but where Mrs. Jennings projects a pornographic French film called *Le Predicament de Marie*, a product clearly antithetical to the Hays Office, Norma and Joe watch actual footage of a then-unreleased film from 1929 titled *Queen Kelly*. Starring Swanson and directed by Eric von Stroheim, who plays Norma’s butler Max in *Sunset Boulevard*, *Queen Kelly* had a few hiccups during its production, many of which had to do with its risqué content that threatened to spoil Swanson’s relationship with Hays. As Swanson later recalled, “[The film] was rank and sordid and ugly, Mr. von Stroheim’s apocalyptic vision of hell on earth, and full of material that would never pass the censors. Something was terribly, terribly wrong” (372). Of course, the footage of *Queen Kelly* shown in *Sunset Boulevard* neglects to show these lewd sections Swanson references, but the integration of a previously unreleased film without the Hays Office’s stamp of approval nevertheless articulates somewhat of an inside joke for viewers knowledgeable in what had already become an esoteric piece of film history.

To this end, *Sunset Boulevard* also questions the social relevance of the Production Code during its postwar setting. Instead of the PCA protecting the public from the potentially corrupt cinema, Max protects Norma from what he views as the heartless public. A former film director who once worked alongside D.W. Griffith and Cecil B.

DeMille, Max tells Joe that he “discovered [Norma] when she was sixteen. I made her a star.” Although perhaps not to the same degree as Norma, Max longs to remain relevant in an era where the new generation hardly remembers early Hollywood stars. At the announcement of Norma on the Paramount soundstage, for instance, even an elderly security guard quips, “Why I thought she was dead!” Outside the soundstage during this same scene, Max points to the reader’s department building that has transplanted his former office and nostalgically tells Joe, “I remember my walls were covered with black leather.” For Max, Norma provides access to his heyday: “It was I who asked to come back, humiliating as it may seem. I could have gone on with my career, only I found everything unendurable after she divorced me.” Prior to Joe’s arrival, Max serves as the gatekeeper of everything that goes in and out of Norma’s mansion, from physical items to valuable information. Because Max knows Norma will not adapt to the outside world, he censors her awareness of it. “This is my job,” he explains to Joe, “It has been for a long time. ... I made her a star. I cannot let her be destroyed.”

Like Mrs. Jennings who turns into a secondhand mogul by capitalizing on the excess of the studio system, Norma has spent her time away from film turning her mansion into something of a self-sustaining movie studio that contains all the key components of an enclosed lot. Echoing the words of Carey McWilliams who once described film studios as “a world within a world” (335), Joe observes that Norma’s mansion feels “out of beat with the rest of the world.” The main entrance of the house, with an archway above its gates, resembles a miniature version of the entrance at Paramount. While Norma of course provides the star power to her own studio, Max

dedicates himself entirely to directing her life by constantly ensuring that her illusions of stardom run smoothly. She repeatedly cries out for Max when Joe packs his suitcase at the end of the film and disrupts Norma's romantic fantasy, as though Max will stop Joe's "incorrect" behavior as Norma's leading man—a role Max formerly occupied as Norma's first husband.

To have a complete movie studio in classic Hollywood requires having movie sets. When Joe first happens upon Norma's mansion, he describes it as "a great big white elephant of a place. The kind crazy movie people built in the crazy twenties." Joe uses "white elephant" in one sense to underscore the mansion's economic extravagance, but the white elephant also calls to mind D.W. Griffith's enormous Babylon set for *Intolerance* built on Sunset Boulevard in the 1910s. Further, Wilder and Brackett's script describes the interior of the mansion in similar terms that evoke a soundstage, having "only thin slits of sunlight find[ing] their way in to fight the few electric bulbs which are always burning" (24). Norma's mansion, similar to Minnie Flynn's house mentioned in Chapter 1, resembles "a scene in a moving picture. It *was* a moving picture" (Marion 313; emphasis in original). Her bedroom includes a "gilded bed in the shape of the swan" and "an imitation baroque fireplace," both "beg[inning] to peel" (25).

The film affirms this movie-set quality with the wind organ in Norma's living room. In a moment reminiscent of the beginning of *What Price Hollywood?*, Norma leads Joe into the room after learning he writes for the movies. The camera remains on Joe as he follows her into the enormous space, his eyes growing wider with each step. Meanwhile, a shrill whistle sound swells, as if to punctuate Joe's increasing sense of

unease. Rather than showing what he sees, the camera remains focused on his reactions, which the music complements. “Intimate, isn’t it?” he remarks cynically. Here the viewer assumes that the music comes from outside the world of the film and that the rise in the music’s intensity reflects Joe’s growing state of bewilderedness. The camera stops with Joe as he stands near Norma, between them a pipe organ welded into the wall. She stares at it and says, “The wind gets in that blasted pipe organ. I ought to have it taken out.” Soon thereafter, the whistling sound stops. Not only does this moment disrupt the viewer’s way of seeing, but it also continues to implicate Norma’s house as an illusory cinematic world, particularly one from the silent era, that provides “natural” music. The film makes this connection explicit when Joe and Norma watch *Queen Kelly*; Joe narrates that “Max would run the projection machine, which was just as well. It kept him from giving us an accompaniment on that wheezing organ.”

Since her heyday during the silent era, Norma has also turned into a screenwriter herself. Adapting the biblical tale of *Salome* for her big return to the screen, she tells Joe “What a woman, what a part. The princess in love with a holy man. She dances the Dace of the Seven Veils. He rejects her, so she demands his head on a golden tray, kissing his cold dead lips.” Joe reduces her script to “a silly hodgepodge of melodramatic plots,” very much like Budd Schulberg’s critique of extra-girl novels as movie plots pushed into prose. In many ways, Joe’s (and later DeMille’s) rejection of the *Salome* script prompts Norma to adopt the script as her real life narrative. Her synopsis of *Salome* clearly foreshadows the basic plot of *Sunset Boulevard* itself: The aging movie queen falls in love with the holy writer who she thinks can save her but, when he rejects her, she

murders him. It is also worth noting here that Swanson's 1925 film *Madame Sans-Gêne* included a color dream sequence where Swanson's character imagines herself as Salome. According to Swanson, this scene constituted the first use of color in any Hollywood film (Swanson 276). Although Norma came from the days of black-and-white, such a biographical detail helps to differentiate *Sunset Boulevard*'s noir aesthetic from Norma's cinematic lens through which she views her world.

Like a writer at a major studio, Joe at one point describes his stay at Norma's as "[a] long-term contract with no options" where he functions as a "ghost writ[er]." Upon reading her draft of *Salome*, Joe says to Norma, "Maybe [the script] is a little long and maybe there are some repetitions, but you're not a professional writer." To offer his professional expertise, Joe suggests adding "maybe a little more dialogue," the same assignment he begs Sheldrake to give him at Paramount earlier: "Any kind of assignment. Additional dialogue." While Joe half-heartedly works on *Salome* to remain concealed from the finance officers, Norma looks to Joe's help because she believes he can help her regain visibility to the outside world.

A kind of cinematic amalgamation of Ben Jardinn, Philip Marlowe, Tod Hackett, and even Homer Simpson, hard-boiled Joe Gillis comes to Hollywood from Ohio where he once worked at the "copy desk" for the Dayton Evening Post. Of all the characters in the film, Joe most clearly represents the literary world—or what remains of it. Unmarried and with "twenty-twenty vision," as he tells Norma, Joe has a critical perspective of the industry that is tied to his knowledge of novelists ranging from Fyodor Dostoevsky, to Charles Dickens, to James Joyce, to Norman Mailer. The film's script even has Sheldrake

accusing Joe of being a “name dropper” when he mentions some of them (Wilder et al. 16). With the exception of Betty Schaeffer, who works for Paramount’s script department and can be seen “typing a synopsis of a novel” in the film (Wilder 92), Joe is the only character in *Sunset Boulevard* who reads books—and certainly the only one who reads them without the agenda of film adaptation. Still, *Sunset Boulevard* highlights Hollywood’s expanding influence on the literary perspective Joe inhabits. While Norma works on her makeover later in the film, Joe sits on the couch reading Irwin Shaw’s *The Young Lions* (1948), a novel based on Shaw’s time away from Hollywood screenwriting to fight in the war. Growing up in the Midwest where he “used to sneak out ... to see a gangster picture” at the age of twelve, Joe has come up in a cinematic imagination that he spends the film denying. At the sight of his own corpse at the beginning of the film, Joe comments, “Poor dope. He always wanted a pool”—something he would never openly admit while he was living.

Rather than belonging to the up and coming generation of Hollywood talent, Joe somewhat romantically plays the role of the cliché pulp writer in Hollywood, even having a work of hard-boiled fiction in his portfolio at Paramount called *Dark Windows*—a combination of Chandler’s novel *The High Window* (1942) and Delmer Davis’s film *Dark Passage* (1947, starring Humphrey Bogart).⁸⁹ The script version of *Sunset Boulevard* also includes a significant line where Betty tells Joe that a Paramount producer “thinks [his novel] could be made into something ... for Barbara Stanwyck” (77), the female lead in *Double Indemnity*. Like several of the pulp writers working for the movies,

⁸⁹ It is worth pointing out that David Goodis, the author of the novel *Dark Passage*, nominally resembles Joe Gillis.

Joe occupies the lower echelon of literary figures, in clear opposition to, say, the Fitzgeralds and Faulkners of the industry. When the film opens, Joe lives in apartment located “above Franklin and Ivar,” the same street where Marlowe lives in *The Big Sleep*, on “Franklin near Kenmore” (Chandler 151), and where Raoul Whitfield stayed in the early 1930s (Rubert et al.). On his apartment walls hang “a couple of reproductions of characterless paintings,” while “orange peels” litter his kitchen counter (Wilder 11). Similar to Tod, and even more similar to Nathanael West himself, Joe struggles to distinguish between artistic expression and mindless entertainment, a conflict he attributes to his time in Hollywood. He narrates, “Things were tough at the moment. I hadn’t worked in a studio for a long time. So I sat there grinding out original stories, two a week. Only I seemed to have lost my touch. Maybe they weren’t original enough. Maybe they were too original. All I know is they didn’t sell.”

Resembling the screenwriters of Chapter 2 who used the figure of the private investigator in their fiction as a masculinized literary counterpart to retrieve a sense of autonomy the studios had stripped from them, Joe regularly speaks of his lack of agency as a screenwriter. He describes himself as “[j]ust a movie writer with a couple of B pictures to his name” and tells Norma, “Last [movie] I wrote was about Okies in the Dust Bowl. You’d never know because when it reached the screen, the whole thing played on a torpedo boat.” Because his lack of past screen credit stifles his attempt to produce more work, he resorts to pitching predictable plots to producers who can describe the ending before he does. Even if he were to receive an impressive screen credit and receive attention from the studios, he reasons, he would nevertheless remain invisible to the

movie-going public: “Audiences don’t now somebody sits down and writes a picture. They think the actors make it up as they go along.” As these lines make clear, Joe understands writing for the movies as invisible labor. For him, his writing merely works to make the actors look better, fortifying that which appears in front of the camera. Perhaps for this reason Joe has little faith in organizations such as the Screen Writer’s Guild. Toward the beginning of the film Norma asks, “You write pictures, don’t you?” to which Joe sarcastically responds, “That’s what my guild card says.” In other words, nowhere else will Norma or anyone else be able to find his writing credentials.

But while Joe presumes his literary integrity sets him apart from the technicolor consciousness of mass culture, *Sunset Boulevard* shows that he straddles the line from the beginning. Like Marlowe, Joe takes advantage of the tourist façade of Hollywood Boulevard to escape the vantage of authority figures. He avoids the finance officers who seek to impound his car, for instance, by hiding it behind Rudy’s Shoeshine Parlor, shot on location on Vine Street and Hollywood Boulevard. In the distance during this sequence, viewers can spot the sign of the famous Brown Derby restaurant where Mary Evans works as a waitress in *What Price Hollywood?* To stress the film’s reality separate from the unreality of white consumerism, the stage direction of this scene specifically describes Rudy as “a colored boy” who “winks after [Joe]” when Joe drives off the lot (13).⁹⁰ Here Joe reductively aligns himself with Rudy, who (Joe rations) similarly

⁹⁰ As much as the film works to show Hollywood’s backside, it ironically reinstates his concealed labor by not providing actor Roy Thompson with a screen credit. In fact, Rudy’s appearance is so brief the PCA reviewer filling out the standard “Analysis of Film Content” form apparently missed him in the form’s “Portrayal of ‘Races’ and Nationals.” The form only lists actor Erich Von Stronheim as “German, probably” and a “Negro corpse” from an earlier scene

performs the invisible labor of sustaining the glitter of “Hollywood,” only on its streets rather than its screen. Rudy, Joe tells the viewer, “look[s] at your heels and knows the score.”

As much as Joe thinks of himself as hard-boiled and separate from white consumerism, however, his obsession with his car makes him a veiled participant in it. Presumably purchasing a convertible to live up to the bright fantasy he imagined, Joe continues to understand his convertible as a signifier of status in Hollywood. At one point he recollects the general optimism felt by writers upon their arrival, himself included, who “itch[] with ambition, pant[] to get your name up of there. Screenplay by. Story by. Hmph!” Given the apparent impossibility of attaining upward mobility within the studio hierarchy, Joe looks to his car as the last hope of physical mobility and ownership. Although his narration leads viewers to assume unequivocally that he needs his car to function (he tells his manager on the golf course, “If I lose my car it’s like having my legs cut off!”), his daily routine in Hollywood hardly gives credence to such desperation. In fact, the furthest he travels before winding up at Norma’s house is to the Paramount Studios and then the Bel-Air golf course, both visits ultimately aimed toward collecting the money to pay off his debts and keep the car. Indeed, viewers see later that in the film that losing his car does not leave him legless. On New Year’s Eve, he manages to get across town by hitchhiking to Artie’s party (in the rain, notably) and then taking a taxi back to Norma’s after her suicide attempt.

cut from the final product of the film where Joe Gillis’s dead body talks to other bodies in the morgue. In this respect, Rudy’s brief onscreen presence enacts Gillis’s sentiment that his blackness can go unnoticed in the eyes of dominant authority in the form of the camera.

Moreover, Joe's unspoken conflation of the concealed labor behind Hollywood's screens and that of Hollywood's street reinstates his whiteness, similar to Tod who spends much of the novel enacting a kind of margin envy by identifying with the people who have come to California to die. Joe's sense of white entitlement surfaces prominently when the finance officers spot him driving his convertible and subsequently begin to chase him down Sunset Boulevard. Turning his car into Norma's driveway and then parking it in her garage (which he hastily assumes is abandoned in spite of the expensive foreign car parked in it), Joe feels entitled to any space he comes across, from a shoe shine parlor to an old mansion, so long as he can hold on to his property. Invoking the language of settlement, he narrates, "At the end of the driveway was a lovely sight indeed: a great big empty garage, just standing there and going to waste."

His quest to escape the authorities and maintain his autonomy quickly proves counter-intuitive, however, as Norma renders him more emasculated and immobile than before. Since she forbids him to leave the house with her script, Joe spends most of the film in her mansion, what he later calls "that peculiar prison of mine." If Max functions as both a director and publicity agent in Norma's makeshift studio, Joe similarly takes on a double duty of ghost writing *Salome* and playing the male lead in Norma's cinematic fantasy. Almost immediately after the finance officers tow Joe's car out of Norma's garage, Norma begins molding him to fit her image of early Hollywood masculinity and extravagance. On the car ride through the Hollywood hills, she makes Joe spit out his chewing gum before suddenly taking notice of Joe's wardrobe. She says, "That's a dreadful shirt you're wearing," to which he responds, "What's wrong with it?"

“Nothing,” she replies sarcastically, “if you work in a filling station.” Following this exchange, Norma takes Joe to what the script describes as “an elegant Wilshire store” (43). Following this exchange, Joe finds himself fully immersed in a world of consumerism and spectacle, now going into the kinds of buildings he used to hide his car behind. It is worth noting that the store where Norma takes him—shot on location—is down the street from Bullock’s department store, where Marlowe and Agnes rendezvous in *The Big Sleep* under its blissfully detached neon sign. Understood in this way, Norma seeks to negate Joe’s hard-boiled traits by transforming his exterior to look the part. When Joe goes into Schwab’s drug store dressed in a tuxedo, he bumps into Betty and Artie and says, “I haven’t been keeping myself at all. Not lately.” Joe’s sense of hard-boiled masculinity is clearly threatened in the Wilshire department store when the salesman pressures him to buy the more expensive clothing option. He asks Joe, “As long as the lady is paying for it, why not take the vicuna?” In response, Joe quickly glares at the man. The camera zooms in for a close-up of their profiles as they look at one another, the salesman smiling unusually close to Joe’s face.

Norma’s New Year’s Eve party offers a particularly pointed example of Joe filling the role of the male lead in Norma’s romance plot. As he walks down the stairs, Norma inspects his tuxedo: “Perfect. Wonderful shoulders. And,” referring to the “V from his shoulders to his hips” (48), she says, “I love that line,” to Joe responds, “All padding. Don’t let it fool you.” Before they begin dancing on the waxed tile floor, Norma says, “Valentino said there is nothing like tiles for tango.” Given that Swanson and Valentino co-starred in a 1922 film called *Beyond the Rocks* where they danced a tango,

this moment aggressively blurs the line between Norma Desmond and Gloria Swanson as Norma attempts to re-create a former cinematic romance. Not incidentally, the tuxedo Joe wears at the New Years party is identical to Valentino's from the 1922 film. Casting Joe in a Valentino role, Norma uses him as a kind of manikin by dressing him in clothes that accentuate an artificial body image. After their tango, Joe narrates that he "felt caught, like a cigarette in the prongs of that contraption on her finger." With a new wardrobe and bedroom connected to Norma's, Joe stars in a Hollywood romance, visible only to the extent that he can complement Norma's image.

Although Joe's posthumous narration situates him in some sort of afterlife limbo, he spends the entire film stuck in a similar state, straddling the line between old Hollywood and what Norma mockingly labels the "new Hollywood trash." In her autobiography, Gloria Swanson even remembers Wilder and Brackett's decision to separate her from the group of younger actors. During production "[they] had cleverly kept this ghostly world of oldies separate from the young Hollywood aspirants who form the other half of Joe Gillis' life" (483). Max draws attention to Joe's young age when he first discusses Norma's former stardom with Joe, telling him, "She was the greatest of them all. You wouldn't know. You're too young." At the same time, the film regularly depicts Joe's disconnect from the industry's up and coming generation. Joe, presumably in his early thirties (William Holden would have been thirty-one at the time of the filming), refers to twenty-two year old Betty Schaeffer as "a kid." "Nothing like being twenty-two," he wistfully remarks. In her attempts to dissuade Betty from being romantically involved with Joe, Norma later tells her, "You may be too young to even

suspect there are men of his sort.” At Artie Green’s New Years party made up of young extras, Joe—tuxedo aside—appears awkward and out of place among the young extras, particularly when he asks two young blonde women if he can use the telephone “when [they’re] through with that thing.” Unlike Detective Smith from *The Studio Murder Mystery* who walks through a film set like an extra and eats the same lunch in the studio cafeteria as the extras do, Joe has remained isolated from this social circle from the start.

Of all the characters in the film, Betty most recognizes Joe for his writing abilities. After dismissing the outline for Joe’s “Bases Loaded” in Sheldrake’s office, she tells him, “Perhaps the reason I hated ‘Bases Loaded’ is because I remember your name. I’d always heard you had some talent.” Likewise, Joe’s general feeling of invisibility allows him to identify with Betty’s relative anonymity among studio bosses. In his office at Paramount, Sheldrake twice mistakes her name by calling her Kramer instead of Schaefer despite her family’s long history with the studio. In Betty, Joe sees a younger version of himself: “She was so like all us writers when we first hit Hollywood.” Matching Joe’s writerly intellect and intuition, Betty can more or less pinpoint his predicament with Norma after finding his golden cigarette case bearing Norma’s signature. She jokingly says, “The old familiar story: You help a timid little soul cross a crowded street. She turns out to be a multi-millionaire and leaves you all her money,” to which Joe replies, “That’s the trouble with you readers. You know all the plots.”

Like Norma who relies on Joe to pen her *Salome* screenplay, Betty wants to co-write an adaptation of Joe’s *Dark Windows* because “I’m not good enough to write it alone.” In direct opposition to Norma, however, Betty has no ambition to become an

actress, which makes Joe all the more attracted to her. Still, she has literally been born out of the studio system as the third generation of what she affectionately calls “a picture family.” A father who “worked [at Paramount] as an electrician till he died, a mother who “still works in wardrobe,” and a grandmother who once “did stunt work for Pearl White,” Betty’s family has spent nearly forty years working to uphold the unreality of Hollywood cinema. Born “just two blocks from this studio on Lemon Grove Avenue,” Betty explains to Joe that her family “expected [her] to become a great star.” She continues, “I had ten years of dramatic lessons, diction, dancing. Then the studio made a test. Well, they didn’t like my nose. Slanted this way a little. So I went to a doctor and had it fixed. They made more tests, and they were crazy about my nose. Only they didn’t like my acting.” Not phased by the empty investment that takes up nearly half her life, Betty maintains her optimistic outlook of the movies and takes control of her future. She tells Joe that failing to become an actress “taught [her] a little sense. I got a job in the mail room, worked up to a stenographic, now I’m a reader!” As if to make painfully obvious how much Betty differs from Norma, she says, “What’s wrong with being on the other side of the cameras? It’s really more fun.”

Betty’s hopeful persistence in climbing the studio hierarchy fuels Joe’s hope that his formerly dead screenwriting career can start moving again. On his way to the studio one evening, he narrates, “That story of mine Betty Schaefer had dug up kept going through my head like a dozen locomotives.” Refusing to let Norma stop his progress, he angrily tells Max, “I’m gonna finish [the script] no matter what.” But in the process of adapting Joe’s novel into a marketable script, Betty also turns it into a sugarcoated

romance—the same fate that eventually befell nearly every novel I have discussed in this dissertation. Early on Betty advises him to “throw out all that psychological mess, exploring a killer’s sick mind.” More important, in adapting *Dark Windows* into a romance, Joe likewise turns into a romantic character himself, distinct from the hollow role he settles for playing with Norma. He admits to the viewer that he feels “crazy about” Betty. No longer a lonely writer, Joe begins to come out of his hard-boiled shell. He compliments Betty’s ability to pen dialogue, saying, “In all seriousness, this is really good. It’s fun writing with you.” In the process of writing the screenplay, soon renamed to “Untitled Love Story,” Joe and Betty have written themselves into it and, by extension, a technicolor romance.

The scene where Betty and Joe take a break from writing their screenplay to “make a little tour of the drowsing lot” signals Joe’s momentary absorption into a technicolor consciousness. In a full shot, the camera pans as the two of them turn a corner onto a western movie set. After walking by the façade of a bank building, the camera shows three men standing on a scaffold painting an artificial light sky. The camera’s pan stops once the sky takes up the whole frame, carefully not to include the edge of the backdrop. Without the painters there, of course, the shot would resemble any western filmed on an indoor stage. In fact, this particular western set was used being for Paramount’s *Copper Canyon* (1950), a technicolor antebellum romance starring Ray Milland from Wilder’s *The Lost Weekend*. In a gesture of self-reflexivity, Joe trades in his noir sensibility for a technicolor one here, just as Mitchum did.

The camera then cuts to another shot of Joe and Betty walking out of the western

set and pans as they walk onto a New York street with European architecture neighboring it. Joe has quite a different relationship to the painters here than he does with Rudy at the beginning of the film. Ignoring Joe and Betty's presence, the painters work late into the evening to prepare the sets "for the next day's shooting." Like Rudy polishing shoes, they perform the invisible physical labor of making the cinematic surface shine. Walking through the simulations of city streets—the same streets Joe watches in gangster pictures as an adolescent—stages the cinematic romance for Betty and Joe. The two of them benefit from the unreality of the set as it literally provides a romantic backdrop to their flirtation. Moreover, Joe has reached a point where he no longer resides behind the facades. He even tells Betty in this scene that she "smells real special ... like a new automobile." Beginning the film by dodging authorities to keep his property, hard-boiled Joe has become softer and now walks amid the white fantasy world with Betty, his new mode of mobility.

Finally understanding that money does not equal mobility, Joe ends the film by realizing the extent to which he has become Norma's property, trapped within a role that ironically forces him to play yet another role with Betty. Prior to her final scene, Betty experiences a kind of unreal version of Joe, one that conceals his situation with Norma entirely. Near the end, Norma asks Betty over the phone, "Exactly how much do you know about him? Do you know where he lives? Do you know how he lives? Do you know what he lives on?" When Betty suggests that she and Joe leave Norma's mansion to live happily ever after, Joe responds, "[W]here? Back to a one-room apartment I can't pay for? Back to a story that may sell and very possibly will not?" Their romance, Joe

suggests, always depended in some way on Norma's financial backing, similar to a studio production.

Like Homer Simpson, whose plans to return to the Midwest never come to fruition, Joe remains utterly trapped in Hollywood. When Norma offers him more money to stay with her, he tells her she would "be throwing it away. I don't qualify for the job, not anymore." As Homer walks out onto Hollywood Boulevard with a suitcase "[i]n both of his hands" (West 178), ready to take a bus to Waynesville eyes "empty of everything, even annoyance" (West 179), Joe walks calmly out of the mansion, suitcase in hand. Not taking the walkway toward the street as Betty does moments earlier, however, Joe deliberately goes toward the pool and hardly appears surprised when Norma shoots, as though choosing to spend his final moments in a Southern California emblem. The "Untitled Love Story" remains incomplete, but *Salome's* narrative plays out to its entirety. Given that Joe ghostwrote for *Salome* and recognizes his role as Norma's romantic lead, I want to suggest that this final scene constitutes his suicide, as if completing his role in *Salome* precisely to escape it. His indirect suicide resonates with Chandler's description of *The Day of the Locust* that prefaces my chapter—"not tragic, not bitter, not even pessimistic," but one that "simply washes its hands of life" (Hiney, *Raymond Chandler Paper* 117). If "[i]n a novel you can still say what you like," as Chandler wrote back in 1946, Joe ends the film realizing that his time with Norma has stripped his literary voice of any value, punctuated by the fact that his posthumous narration drops out in the final scene to give Norma the final word.

With Joe dead and Norma institutionalized like Carmen Sternwood at the end of *The Big Sleep*, *Sunset Boulevard* waves goodbye to the literary narratives their characters represented during the reign of the studio system. In the final sequence, the camera shows Hedda Hopper—former silent actress-turned-gossip columnist—as the only person weeping for Norma as she descends the stairs. Betty—who will marry Artie, “as nice a guy that ever lived,” and continue climbing the studio ranks into a screenwriter position—remains the only possibility of a Hollywood novelist within the film. But since Joe sacrifices his romance with her to ensure her continued optimism, the film implies that a future novel from Betty critiquing the industry is not likely. Moments before his death, Joe advises Betty to learn from his mistake and “be admirable.” Unlike the majority of novelists writing about Hollywood, and certainly unlike all the novelists I have examined, Betty will continue to view the studio favorably, understanding the Paramount backlot, for instance, not as the “dream dump” from *The Day of the Locust* or the epitome of moral decline in *The Studio Murder Mystery*, but as a playground filled with happy childhood memories. “Look at this street,” she tells Joe as they walk through the sets earlier, “All cardboard, all hollow, all phony, all done with mirrors. But you know? I like it better than any street in the world. Maybe because I used to play here as a kid.” Born out of the movies, to borrow Louis B. Mayer’s phrasing, Betty will not befoul the studio she calls home.

IV.

A year after its release, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that “Gloria Swanson’s fabulous house in ‘Sunset Boulevard’ is now a major landmark for sightseers here. Crowds come to the mansion every day, entering the driveway just as William Holden did in the movie” (D2). While Wilder and Brackett’s film may have stirred some controversy among the first generation of moguls, it nevertheless continued to feed the promotional apparatus of an industry shaken by the incursion of television, HUAC trials, and antitrust legal battles. A couple decades later, Billy Wilder lamented to an interviewer, “I was accused of making vulgar and shocking and obscene pictures 20 and 25 years ago; they have now been re-rated as G for general consumption on television at six o’clock for kids while they are having their dinner” (Horton 69).

As 1950 drew to a close, newspaper columnist Philip Scheuer looked back on the year’s curious trend of Hollywood-on-Hollywood films. “Having ‘exposed’ every other ‘racket’ in the country,” he begins the piece, “Hollywood turned on itself in 1950 with a ferocity that startled even itself.” Not surprisingly, the first film mentioned in his article is *Sunset Boulevard*, which he deems the “most striking” film of all, followed immediately by a description of Santana Pictures’s *In a Lonely Place*, “scarcely less furious [than *Sunset Boulevard*] in its onslaught on the local fleshpots.” The similarity between the films certainly justifies the inclination to compare them. Among other things, both focus on male screenwriters who suffer from writer’s block, both integrate black-and-white location shots of Los Angeles, and both feature stars who play a some version of themselves. Shortly before production for *In a Lonely Place* began, for instance,

Humphrey Bogart got into some legal trouble for his public violent behavior at a New York restaurant, an episode more or less recreated in the film with Dix Steele's "outbursts" at Paul's Restaurant (Polan 25). Further, *In a Lonely Place* recasts Bogart as a kind of outdated hard-boiled detective that Bogart made iconic a decade earlier. Although quite different from the film version, Dorothy B. Hughes's original novel has Dix "writing a detective novel." One character asks Dix, "Who are you stealing from, Chandler or Hammett or Gardner?" to which Dix replies, "Little of each ... With a touch of Queen and Carr" (46). One might say that Bogart's performance of Dix Steele draws from a "little of each" of his previous hard-boiled detective roles.

Released eight months after *Sunset Boulevard*, *In a Lonely Place* rode the coattails of *Sunset Boulevard* by undermining of the Production Code Administration. The PCA correspondence for *In a Lonely Place* reflects a much less formal tone than a few years prior. On June 8th, 1949, *In a Lonely Place*'s producer Robert Lord wrote to Breen:

Dear Joe,

Here are two very advance copies of our first draft next Bogart picture [sic]. I suspect this will throw you into convulsions, but sincerely hope not. I wish Mr Bogart were Shirley Temple so that we could do tales of sweetness and light with him. But since he is not, we will have to push the steam roller uphill to make the pictures of this type with him. Sorry to cause your office and myself so much trouble. (MPAA)

Excessively informal and clearly not proofread, Lord's letter highlights the extent to which filmmakers no longer felt the need to grovel to Breen's office. Lord's mocking of Shirley Temple, Breen's golden ticket to moralizing the screen in the 1930s, illuminates how the PCA's agenda had largely expired and devolved into a form of decorum. Bleak depictions of the industry, while running the risk of frustrating Breen, had become fair game—even if they required some extra “push.” Rather than asking for permission, the studios now asked for pardon. Times had no doubt changed since Will Hays's address at the Hollywood Bowl in 1922.

In 1970, a seventy-one Gloria Swanson appeared as a guest alongside a twenty-seven year old Janis Japlin on Dick Cavett's popular television talk show. When Cavett asks Swanson about *Queen Kelly*, a piece he says only “film buffs know about,” Swanson fumbles with her dress as she begins to share her memories of early Hollywood and Will Hays:

I was producing [*Queen Kelly*], and I walked off the set ... [I]n those days we really had censorship. We had a man that we were scared to death of, and his name was Will Hays, and he was a czar. And if he said he couldn't do something, he meant it, because in those days we had women's clubs who would boycott your pictures, and of course then you would be no help to the studio you were working for. ... In those days, you couldn't even knit or crochet a bootie in a movie because then they'd say you were pregnant.

When Cavett's studio audience begins to laugh in response to this final line, Swanson turns to them and attempts to speak over the playful commotion. "No, I'm not making this up!" she says, "This is absolutely the truth!" What this generational gap reflects, as Janis Joplin's presence helps make clear, is that the novels written at a time when powerful stars felt "scared to death" of the Hays Office had become completely divorced from their political and technological contexts. With celebrity culture expanding beyond Hollywood stardom, morality clauses and names like Will Hays became relics of a forgotten time. Likewise, the novels that once challenged the dominance of the industry had expired into nostalgic mementos of Hollywood's golden age. But for a moment, however fleeting, these novels told a different story, one that elicited critical distance among a readership coming to terms with an ever-expanding visual culture.

Conclusion

The same year Gloria Swanson appeared on Dick Cavett's television talk show, novelist and screenwriter Joan Didion published her second novel *Play It As It Lays* (1970), a postmodern work that recontextualizes the extra-girl novel of the 1920s in a post-studio landscape. In a 1964 essay, Didion suggested that Hollywood in the wake of the studio system struggled to distinguish itself from its golden age. Although studios no longer operated as factories, Didion writes, "the American motion picture industry still represents a kind of mechanical monster, programmed to stifle and destroy all that is interesting and worthwhile and 'creative' in the human spirit" (*Slouching* 135). For her, although it "was laid to rest, dead of natural causes, some years ago," such a monster "still haunts Hollywood itself" (*Slouching* 135). While directors could now make the kinds of films they wanted without "a Code Seal" (*Slouching* 141), many films still followed the tried-and-true formulas from the studio era to gain what Didion describes as "comfortable feedback from the audience" (*Slouching* 138).

Thirty-one-year-old Maria Wyeth in *Play It As It Lays* demonstrates how little the media industries have changed since the collapse of the studio system. Much like Faye Greener, Maria views herself as the lead in an ongoing film, what she calls "the scenario of her life" (50), yet she remains within a business still dominated by men who rely on the image of young women to sell their films. As I will show, to mediate her existence in a callous post-studio landscape, Maria looks back to the kinds of PCA-approved narratives produced in earlier decades. Finally, although the novel offers models of alternative femininity separate from Hollywood gender norms, Maria continues to trap

herself within the male-produced fiction even though her chances for success have expired. Given that she worked as a model before turning to acting, Maria understands herself through a series of images produced for the purpose of making something (fashion accessories) or someone (Carter) look better. She ends her narrative in a mental institution, joining Carmen Sternwood and Norma Desmond.

As Gloria Swanson and Janis Joplin's appearance on Dick Cavett's talk show helps illustrate, Maria belongs to the first generation of young women raised amid shifting conceptions of female celebrity. Growing up in Nevada, Maria at a young age looks to mass-produced images of femininity as a standard for which to strive. Her mother, who thinks "being an actress was a nice idea," cuts Maria's hair "in bangs to look like Margaret Sullavan" (8), a film star in the 1930s and 1940s who switched to television roles in the 1950s. Since Maria would have grown up in the 1940s and 1950s, just as the studio system was collapsing and television was becoming the dominant entertainment medium, her mother's effort to map Sullavan's appearance onto her reflects not only how the standards of female beauty persist into the post-studio era but also how television made such images more socially pervasive.

Maria makes her way into the acting world by marrying a young filmmaker named Carter Lang, who gives her the starring role in his early projects. The novel describes Carter's first film, appropriately titled *Maria*, as a low budget documentary compiled of footage of Maria during her modeling career in New York. As if to avoid the traditional Hollywood narrative, "Carter had simply followed Maria around New York and shot film" (20). This experimental film depicts Maria in her daily life, from "arguing

with the billing department at Bloomingdale's" to "cleaning some marijuana with a kitchen strainer" (20). Although the *Maria* film goes on to "w[i]n a prize at a festival in Eastern Europe," it lacks a mainstream audience. Perhaps for this reason, Maria does "not like to look at it" (20). She has the opposite reaction, for instance, when she watches Carter's second film, the studio-produced, low-budget *Angel Beach*, in which she plays a character "raped by the members of a bicycle gang" (19).

Similar to Minnie Flynn who favors her reflection in the men's saloon window over the women's fashion store window, Maria prefers watching herself as a character created by Carter to the less mediated style of "that first picture" (21). Since "the studios still put up almost all the money" for mainstream film and "still control all effective distribution," as Didion noted in 1973 (*White Album* 155-56), the studio that produces *Angel Beach* in the novel changes Carter's ambiguous conclusion of "a shot of the motorcycle gang" to a more happy ending showing "Maria strolling across a campus" (19). Unable to adapt to the experimental mode of filmmaking, Maria "prefer[s] the studio cut" reminiscent of classic Hollywood (20). In spite of *Angel Beach*'s lurid content, "[Maria didn't] have any sense that the girl on screen was herself... [S]he liked watching the picture: the girl on the screen seemed to have a definite knack for controlling her own destiny" (19-20), while the real Maria in Carter's first film "had no knack for anything" (21). Because the woman in *Maria* at once represents everything she is and also everything with which she does not identify, Maria paradoxically emulates the image of herself when the image represents someone else. But since her character in

Angel Beach can only ever exist on screen, Maria spends the novel attempting to embody a one-dimensional surface.

Having only ever acted for Carter, Maria believes that he holds the key to her future film career. As a result, she passively submits to his authority against her best interests. Maria provided him the material for his early films, but Carter has increasingly neglected her as she ages out of her twenties. He spends most of his time with a younger actress, Susannah Wood, whom he will more than likely use the same way he used Maria. At one point, the novel notes that Maria “[q]uite often with Carter ... felt like Ingrid Bergman in *Gaslight*” (40), a 1944 film about a husband driving his wife insane. The comparison she draws here suggests that she will continue living with Carter’s abuse, no matter how dangerous, so long as she has a classic cinematic narrative with which to make sense of it. Seeing herself as the lead actress from a studio-era film reduces her tragic situation to a palatable narrative within the moral parameters of the Hays Office. Indeed, the novel suggests that Breen’s dead code becomes the means by which Maria makes sense of her senseless existence. Even her recurring fantasy of escaping the industry to live happily in a “house by the sea” (114) with screenwriter Les Goodwin and her daughter Kate clearly comes from something out of *From Here to Eternity* (1953).

One might argue that the freeways serve as a possible space where Maria reclaims a sense of agency in the face of patriarchal domination, as she experiences “the lull between sleeping and waking” (16). Since “her only destination [is] the freeway” (30), a restrictive physical structure, readers begin to understand Maria as a character who willingly forgoes her potential for control. To call the freeway a destination in itself

indicates her lack of direction and willingness to go wherever the highway takes her. Whether by the freeway or by Carter, she requires direction to function within the cinematic narrative she desires. Similar to her illusion of agency while driving on the freeway, Maria feels most in control when she takes Carter's direction. In a courtroom scene where a lawyer accuses Carter of physically and mentally abusing Maria, she thinks to herself, "This Maria Lang to whom the lawyers referred seemed to Maria someone other than herself, an aggrieved wife she might see interviewed on television" (108).

Nowhere is Maria's obedience to Carter made clearer than in the novel's abortion scene. When she tells Carter of her pregnancy with a baby that probably does not belong to him, he threatens to take their daughter Kate away from her. Resonating with studio morality clauses, Carter fears that potential public gossip of an illegal abortion might threaten his career. For this reason, he refers her to "the only man in Los Angeles County who d[oes] clean work" (54). In perhaps the most disturbing scene of the novel, Maria's sense of "pain as the doctor scraped signified nothing beyond itself, no more constituted the pattern of her life than did the movie on television in the living room of this house in Encino" (82). With only a "little local [anesthesia] on the cervix" (82), Maria lacks the capacity to define the abortion in cinematic terms and, as a result, fails to register the physical and mental ramifications of her situation. The doctor even tells her, "[Q]uite often the pain is worse when we think about it" (82). This central moment in the text exemplifies the way Maria sacrifices her interior to sustain her surface image, or at least the possibility of it.

During the abortion, Maria hears the sound of a movie on a television in the other room, but “she was lying here not watching the movie, and that was all there was to that” (82-83). The man in the white duck pants who drives Maria to and from the abortion later tells Maria that she “missed a pretty decent movie,” one starring the actress Paula Raymond. She “was a pretty girl,” the man observes, “Funny she never became a big star” (84). Similar to Maria who never becomes a big star, Paula Raymond had success in the 1950s, but a car accident on Sunset Boulevard in 1962 severely damaged Raymond’s face and, as Raymond explains, made “getting back to work” difficult (qtd. in Verswijver 153).⁹¹ Didion draws a connection between Maria’s situation and Raymond’s, suggesting that Maria might have been able to understand the tragedy of her situation had she only been able to see Raymond’s image on TV. It is as though she does not know how to react without someone showing her how.

Within the novel, however, Maria is confronted with modes of femininity that resist such patriarchal visibility. After unsuccessfully attempting to break the news of her pregnancy to screenwriter Les Goodwin on a payphone on Sunset Boulevard, Maria hangs up and watches “a woman in a muumuu walk out of the Carolina Press Motel and cross the street to a supermarket ... [I]t seemed to [Maria] that she was watching the dead still center of the world, the quintessential intersection of nothing” (66-67). For Maria, this woman embodies the possibility of physically occupying an image-driven landscape while ideologically existing outside of it. The woman in the muumuu’s lifestyle in a motel signifies a threat to the hegemonic structures by which the industry operates. Maria

⁹¹ According to Leo Verswijver, she was pronounced dead at the hospital, “but a neurologist was able to keep her alive and plastic surgery was a necessity” (153).

watches as the woman, who remains void of potential value for men like Carter (i.e., by the standards of the industry, metaphorically a “nothing”), “walked in small mincing steps and kept raising her hand to shield her eyes from the vacant sunlight” (67). A later chapter where Maria fantasizes about a seaside getaway refers back to the woman in the muumuu: “[T]he still center of the daylight world was never a house by the sea but the corner of Sunset and La Brea” (115). Because Maria has geared her life toward being recognized, however, she can never attain the kind of subversive invisibility, the nothingness, that the woman in the muumuu represents.

Aside from the woman in the muumuu, *Play It As It Lays* presents an alternative model of femininity toward the end of the novel when Maria visits Carter’s filming location in the desert town “between Death Valley and the Nevada line” (187). Maria nostalgically compares the town to her own childhood home in Silver Wells, which has since been demolished by A-bomb tests. A woman who owns the town coffee shop befriends Maria and, after a couple days, invites Maria to her trailer-home “on the edge of town ... set on a concrete foundation ...[,] and beyond the fence lay a hundred miles of drifting sand” (198). Given that she provides Maria with the names of her husband and his mistress from Barstow, Lee and Doreen Baker (199), it is significant that that this woman remains nameless in the novel. Like the woman in the muumuu, her lack of a name on the page suggests that she cannot be reduced to representation in opposition to Maria who essentially lives for representation. Lee and Doreen, on the other hand, act out a love affair made familiar and nameable by Hollywood. When the woman tells Maria

that Lee ran off with Doreen, Maria begins to cry because it resonates with her current situation with Carter:

“You ever made a decision?” [the woman] said suddenly, letting the broom fall against the fence.

“About what.”

“I made a decision in ’61 at a meeting in Barstow and I never shed one tear since.”

“No,” Maria said. “I never did that.” (199)

Thus ends the chapter with the reader never knowing exactly what the woman means by “decision” or what took place at her “meeting in Barstow.” Indeed, the “meeting” could have been anything from a simple confrontation to a violent murder of the two lovers. Either way, the woman’s ambiguous narrative does not offer the comfort of cinematic closure. Whatever happened in Barstow in ‘61, she achieved the feat of no longer submitting to the authority of a corrupt husband. The technicolorful fairytale of marriage and happiness has since faded under the desert sun. It is no coincidence that the constant sand blowing in the woman’s yard covers her “straight-backed chair with pale *film*” (199; my emphasis). Now living outside such a narrative of domestic bliss, she spends her time “sweeping the sand into small piles” while “[n]ew sand bl[ows] in” (199). Similar to Didion’s minimalist prose, this woman’s narrative can only be understood through its silences.

On a broader level, then, *Play It As It Lays* demonstrates that in the post-studio era, where television flickers in nearly every American living room, the white space on

the page has become the only way to counter the media spectacle that inundates everyday life. Although physical books commonly include blank pages at the end, the bare white pages at the end of *Play It As It Lays* somehow feel far more present, far more intentional. Inherently beyond representation and adaptation, such blankness on the one hand performs Maria's unattainable utopia, "the quintessential intersection of nothing." On the other hand, it renders the Hollywood novel speechless.

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